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ABSTRACT

This volume contains a collection of essays, reflections, and other writings (many of which originally appeared in several journals) on the relations among self and school and community. The first selection is an obituary of Fritz Perls, a leader of Gestalt therapy. The second essay, "A Social and Political Reassessment of the Work of Wilhelm Reich Today," asks readers to step back and consider certain fundamental issues raised by his work. The next essay, "Reality and the Rose Curtain: Owning Your Anger," reflects on changes and trends in the Free School Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Following is another essay about that educational movement, "The Free School Controversy: A Letter from America" which offers reflections on community, the philosophy of education, and the nature of human relations. The next article, "Shoestring School," describes the Free School in Albany's South End (New York), a poor mixed Italian and Black neighborhood. A more formal history of the Free School follows, including many photographs of the teachers and students. "The Free School Community" offers reflections on the nature and rewards of the community that has grown up around that school. The final essay "The Pursuit of Literacy" argues for the importance of literacy in education and for democratic society. (JB)

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LOOKING FOR ONE'S SHADOW AT NOON

Vol. II

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LOOKING FOR ONE'S SHADOW AT NOON:

Vol. I
Looking for the Self in Family and Society

Vol. II
Finding the Self in School and Community

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FOREWORD

This collection of articles in two volumes represents a pretty fair sampling of my urgent concerns over a period of twelve years, between 1972 and 1984, with a sprinkling of more recent ones. Looking for the central theme which runs through them all, my first awareness was that it is a broad one, encompassing as it does both concerns for personal growth and equally and by extension, for the society; for the quality of life in families and for the function of school in that society. Gradually, the theme of "school" has widened to include the entire issue of social institutions and their impact on life in the family and in society, and comes to rest in the concept of community as the only proper testing ground for those institutions.

I call this collection *Looking For One's Shadow at Noon*, because understanding human experience as I have been struggling to do has come more and more to assume for me a mysterious quality which evokes the image of attempting to reach the hidden through the seen, mainly by a process of allowing whatever comes up, be it sensation, feeling, intuition or belief which constitutes one response to that "given," to have its proper "place" or teaching function within the realm of one's being.

Reading over these essays, especially the ones in Part II, most of which were written during the 70's and 80's, I am struck

by the changes my attitudes have undergone since that period. When I have asked myself why I have still wanted to publish this material, the snwer is that it clearly represents a phase in my growth which is partisan and opinionated, yet still vigorous and provocative. As such, I realized that it could stand for that same process within each of us, and that so long as I was not claiming to be "objective" or "balanced" in my beliefs, it was quite all right to want to publish them. I hope that one or two will strike a spark of recognitionwith some reader.

It will perhaps also be clear to him that there is very little of so-called "enlightenment" in these essays - at least, as the term is usually used. They stand more or less as they "came in," with whatever degreee of insight, joy, paranoid projection, rage, judgment, or whatever was aroused in me at the time of their writing. It is this sense I have of "standing" upon my shadow in the clear light of noon which has formed the basis for the title of these meditations. Perhaps I use the term "stand" in a sense which is similar to Martin Luther's, "Here I stand; I can do no other," in the sense that each formulation represents my "position" at that time in regard to that issue, and is thus a function of what one might call "shadow projection." If any "clear light" begins to filter through the darkness of each shadow projection, this will have occurred as a result of my "not doing" far more than in any other way.

Thus, the notion of "looking for," contrasted with "finding," the self in the titles of these two volumes refers not to any

particular degree of enlightenment I believe I have attained, but simply a feeling of having ended the search as a goal in itself - and begun merely to live my life. The "contrast," then, is not really there, but is more a kind of flickering between "dark and light" which one might liken to the flickering of projected images seen on old movie film run at a slow speed, created by the passage of the shutter between the still pictures to give the illusion of motion.

The truth is that nothing seems quite as clear-cut, as "given," to me as it used to, but seems to depend for its effect on the varying conditions of response I myself bring to bear on the events of my life. More and more I seem to perceive the hands of the divine coming through the image of my own hands, the voice of God speaking through me when I speak clearly. Each time I find that invisible shadow under the light of high noon, that darkness seems to light up more and more completely. This strange quality of evocativeness comes through the writing more as I look back on it than it did when I wrote it down. I say, "Did I write that?" The answer to that question seems to me by no means self-evident.

January, 1993.

Volume II
FINDING THE SELF IN SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY

TRIBUTE TO FRITZ PERLS
from *Energy & Character*

COMMENT:

This obit is the first writing of mine ever to see print! My dear therapist and friend David Boadella was the literary midwife to this first effort, published in his journal Energy and Character, *in May, 1971. My part of it is very personal, very biographical, and this approach to Gestalt therapy feels to me a lot like Fritz's own. I seem to be trying to look past his words to the man himself. Actually, the piece had a different ending, now missing, in which I resurrected old Fritz, sat naked with him in a hot tub at Esalen and watched to see whether or not he would play erotically with me as he says of himself he loved to do with the pretty young girls, tickling their nipples with his beard and watching them grow erect. Using myself as a model, I was sadly aware that he would not have attempted this with me, forgave him, and let him lie back down in his coffin, his life's work done. This acid test of the whole person seems to have struck David as irrelevant, certainly too erotic, perhaps too disrespectful, undoubtedly inappropriate in a serious journal! And that's OK too.*

Actually, the point I was trying to make was a serious one, made later by Martin Shepherd in his two books In and Out of a Psychiatrist's Head, *subtitled* My Tantric Summer *and his*

biography Fritz. Shepherd saw clearly, as felt I did, using myself as a model, the significance of his exaggerated sexual promiscuity as a defense against the fear of death, as I was expressing - and seeing - my own doubts and fears about my sexual desirability through this fantasied relationship with Fritz - doing so as the ultimate tribute to his method.

I first came across Fritz Perls in the *Whole Earth Catalog*, that marvellous source book for everything a body would ever need to launch the New Society, in 1969. His lively face, framed with prophetic white hair, came out of the page to me as I scanned the section on Community. There he was, represented by his book *Gestalt Therapy Verbatim*, made from tapes of encounter sessions at Esalen Institute at Big Sur, California. *WEC*'s comment on the book was,

> Fritz Perls makes a career of being usefully insufferable. This book is an unvarnished transcript of his groups at Esalen Institute being whipped into shape. How to be a pain in the ass and loved. Kesey likes him a lot. Barry Stevens picks out these Fritz pearls from the beginning of the book.

Then follow a series of short statements which are very Fritz-like, and do well to give you the gist of what he was saying, so I might as well let Fritz speak for himself. He liked it better that way!

> I have often been called the founder of Gestalt therapy. That's crap. If you call me the finder or re-finder of Gestalt therapy, okeh. Gestalt is as ancient and as old as the world itself.
>
> Gestalt philosophy tries to be in harmony with what *is*.

Take responsibility for every emotion, every movement you make, every thought you have, and shed responsibility for *anybody* else.

Wanting to be helpful is doomed from the beginning.

Each time you ask the question *Why?* you diminish in stature. You bother yourself with false, unnecessary information. You only feed the computer, the intellect. And the intellect is the whore of intelligence. It's a drag on your life.

Anxiety is the gap between the now and the later.

The organism does not make decisions. Decision is a man-made institution. The organism works always on the basis of *preference.*

If you feel comfortable in yourself, you don't love yourself and you don't hate yourself, you just live .

The simplicity of the Gestalt approach is that we pay attention to the obvious, to the utmost surface. We don't delve into a region which we don't know anything about, into the so-called unconscious.

Very many people have no center, and without a center you wobble in life.

Any deliberate change is doomed to failure. Change has to come by itself through organismic self-regulation.

We apply enough skillful frustration so that the patient is forced to find his own way, discover his own potential, and discover that *what he expects from the therapist, he can do just as well himself.* My whole definition of learning is that *learning is discovering that something is possible.*

That was in the Fall, 1969, Catalog. The Spring, 1970, issue came out after Fritz Perls' death not long before, at Lake Cowichan, British Columbia, in Canada, where he had come the previous summer to help found a Gestalt community. When I

first began thinking about this piece on Fritz, I suddenly realized that I had to know how and why he died, so I called up the community and asked. The man I talked with sounded bored and distant, and rather scornful of my wish to know about Fritz's death; "Why would you want to know something like that? I have no interest in such things, and I can't imagine why you would, " he said.

I didn't try to get through to him across an entire continent - an image of humming wires and shivering, tiny sparrows resting on their way south reinforcing my feeling that it was too remote. I just made my request more urgent, and finally, reluctantly, and bit by bit, he told me what had happened. Fritz had had exploratory abdominal surgery, and had died of a heart attack following the operation. No, they hadn't found much wrong. A little gall bladder inflammation. I thought about Fritz's words in his autobiography, *In and Out of the Garbage Pail*,

> Cope and withdraw, contract and expand, implode and explode - it's the heart imploding, contracting, opening to be filled. Permanent contracting leads to quick death, as does permanent extension.

And another sequence.

> Was there any peak experience in crying? There certainly was. Oh, I don't mean the usual type of being moved. I don't ever remember crying when I was so unhappy with Marty. I remember very vividly my crying with agony and pain before the second operation. Are those the suicide-substitute operations? When Faust gets upset with Mephistopheles he calls him a travesty of dirt and blood, a shithouse, as we would say .... I was always ashamed of being sick. It was like a stigma. Even in the

trenches I preferred to conceal a high-fever tonsillitis than to admit to such a "weakness".

I am now ashamed to admit to my bleeding piles and the soiled underwear that went with it... I decided on an operation. Waking up the following morning, a male voice, a nurse, said to me: "Am I glad that you are back. " I heard that I had spent 12 hours in the recovery room and that they had about given up on me. What had happened? Wrong medication? A heart infarct? That would explain the heart trouble of the next five years.... The recollection of that night came back during a psilocybin trip.... And I came back from that trip with a strong will to live. Not to please someone, but finally for my own selfish sake. The existential mood of being "condemned to" life changed into being "blessed with" life. I completed the despair implosion that I had started in the Arden house. I am blessed with life.

I am blessed with a full and useful life. I am alive. I am.

I suppose the unique thing about Fritz Perls was that sense he conveyed of his own reality as a human being. Laing talks about the impossibility of getting to the person by a systematized model *about* him, because of the nature of our perceptual processes, which function as Gestalten, so that you cannot hold simultaneous perceptions of him as S-O-R (stimulus-organism-response) system, say, as the behaviorists do, and a person as well. Fritz's "model" of human life cannot be evaluated apart from his own personal aliveness, the Gestalt that was Fritz Perls. And this Gestalt is one of rare beauty and humanity. He himself, being an actor in his early career when he worked with Reinhardt in Germany, was quite well aware of his own "hamminess". He accepted this in himself, as he did everything else. Watching him work with patients in one of the many films he made while he was at Esalen, I had a marvellous sense of his aliveness, of his being *really there* with these

His eyes in particular, were centers of this life - soft, full, alert, filled with a deep energy that glowed and moved. There was no sense of self - his whole being was absorbed in the work. Too, there was no sense of his being the guru. Something in Fritz, perhaps his sense of the polarities in every experience - always returned you to yourself.

In the words of his Gestalt prayer:

> I do my thing and you do your thing. I am not in this world to live up to your expectations, And you are not in this world to live up to mine. You are you and I am I. And if by chance we find each other, it's beautiful. If not, it can't be helped. Shalom.

A SOCIAL AND POLITICAL REASSESSMENT
The Work of Wilhelm Reich Today:
from *Energy & Character*

It may not be my proper place to launch a wholesale critique of the state of "Reichianism" in the present world. I do not feel qualified to develop and validate a new set of conclusions regarding the multitude of activities and investigations into the entire spectrum of phenomena which arise from the work begun by Reich during his lifetime. This writing is intended, rather, to serve in a kind of gadfly - or "emperor's new clothes" - role which asks the people most deeply involved in pursuing Reich's lead in some way or another to step back for a moment and look. I do not feel the need to apologize for the lack of scientific adequacy of some of my observations. They are exactly what they seem: allegorical and highly charged images.

This fall our school instituted a new program called the "Free Learning Exchange," which is exactly what the name implies. Anyone wishing either to take or give a course in any field simply signs up for what (s)he wants, and we play broker for him, attempting to find instructors or students, as the case may be. My contributions this session have been a course on maternal health and one on Wilhelm Reich. It is principally about the latter that I wish to speak, although in my mind, the two topics are related.

During the course of this class, I have re-read as much of the written material as I possess, either by or about Reich. This

study has sharpened afresh my love, admiration, and respect for the quality of Reich's thinking, doing, and being as a person which I very much need to reaffirm here. My need comes from a feeling of personal isolation as a passionate believer in the essentiality of carrying out Reich's work in society, especially his work with mothers and children of the poor.

If it sounds as though what I were about to say comes from a belief that "I'm the only one who understands Reich, am the only one who has taken risks by adhering to his principles and/or findings", that's really not the case! It is my belief that anyone who truly follows Reich's footsteps in a real way takes a very real risk in one way or another of being discounted by a very large and influential body of people. This body includes most of the scientific, academic, and professional fields, so that if one is truly concerned to make his life and work of value by basing it in some real way on Reich's work and life, then he runs the real risk of being discounted by the bulk of those people who claim to represent the establishment views of scientific and objective reality concerning the nature of society and human life! That's a pretty big order!

No; what I am trying to get at in my discomfort with a great many of the people who call themselves "Reichian" in some manner or degree is paradoxical in nature, because it can only be seen by blotting out this larger context of self-evaluation which apparently forms the "reality" against which most "Reichians" see themselves vis-à-vis society at large. If I might offer a couple of analogies for this notion, it strikes me as similar in some ways to the plight of the ordinary academic or

professional man whose entire life-style precludes his ever having to compare his "suffering" - the ordinary frustrations and oppressions of the middle-class, salaried person whose livelihood depends on his following a career which brings him in sufficient economic prosperity to live comfortably at the expense of a great deal of personal deprivation with which we are all familiar - I say, to compare HIS suffering with that of people in the economic bracket of income below, say, $5,000 a year, or worse, with the suffering of people supported by the welfare system. It is a great temptation for a person in the former position to look on welfare clients as in some ways less oppressed than he - in that, in fantasy, they are free, time-wise, to spend their money in leisure activities, never having to put in "an honest day's work", in contrast with "me", who "has to be at the office every damn day, rain or shine, giving my life to other people's needs at the expense of my own!"

The other analogy may be more disturbing to Reich's friends and followers. It concerns the art of psychoanalysis as practiced by Freud's supporters. David Boadella paraphrases Reich's observations in regards to Freud's own comment that "he wondered whether people accepted psychoanalysis in order to preserve it or in order to destroy it," by pointing to the findings of psychoanalysis as "cultural dynamite that appeared to represent an intolerable threat to traditional mores", concluding that "in conservative Vienna at least, many of its supporters were in the process of destroying it as they

increasingly gave up the libido theory and the social critique implicit in psychoanalysis" in order to gain respectability[1] .

This latter analogy spells out the kernel of my own critique of the state of "Reichianism" today. I do not see many people whose personal characteristics qualify them for playing a leading role in alerting society to the earth-shaking implications of Reich's views who are functioning "on the frontier" of society in the same way Freud and Reich themselves did! I see Reichians who have decided to stake their claims to being followers of Reich choosing the least socially disturbing aspects of the legacy, while claiming (at least, some of them claim) to severe personal risks by, for example, refusing to water down the concept of orgastic potency or of the orgone itself! To me, this represents what I call a "refugee mentality," similar to the Hungarian, Cuban, or Vietnamese refugees who live in such large groups in the United States, and who reinforce with one another their backward-looking orientation to the significance of their lives by pointing to the personal injustices and dangers incurred in the events which forced them to flee their countries!

It is perfectly clear to me that in fact many establishment figures do regard as anathema such Reichian concepts as orgastic potency and the orgone! But it is also true that the name and findings of Reich are being reassessed and even accepted as valid in an increasingly large sector of

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[1] Boadella, David. *Wilhelm Reich, The Evolution of his Work.* Dell Publishing Co., N.Y., 1975, p. 71.

informed society, and that there is a still larger group of professional people who use many of those findings as "truth" without openly acknowledging their origin. Such people as Dunbar, Fromm, Bergler, Adorno, and Perls have given at best begrudging credit to him, and many of them do not even do that - to say nothing of the horde of practicing psychoanalysts who use his character analysis and even his own explication of it as classical background data for the training of new analysts without once mentioning the "other aspects" of Reich's work.

If a Reichian follower orients himself toward (or rather, against) such people, then I can easily understand how he can continue to see himself as taking risks in his personal life by publicly proclaiming his adherence to an un-watered-down version of Reich's work. But, you know, I do not see it that way. It is becoming increasingly apparent to me that all too often the people who center their lives on the continuation of Reich's work do so by distorting and invalidating the very principles by which Reich governed his life! That's a drastic statement. I'd like to spell it out further. To do so, it is necessary for me to resort to another use of the "psychoanalytic" analogy I used above, and then, to quote Reich himself on the subject of Freud and of risk-taking in general. Th;s is a risk in itself, because, as anyone knows, the devil can quote scripture, and anyone who quotes Reich in support of a particular thesis of his own can be accused of quoting him out of context - and only too often, in Reich's case, this is true!

OK. Reich himself, as I have said, was acutely aware of the fact that he alone, of all of Freud's followers refused to back

down on the earth-shaking implications for society of the original concepts of psychoanalysis. In *Reich Speaks of Freud*, he discourses very poignantly on this awareness. I believe it is worth restating.

> ... As long as I brought ten thousand, twenty thousand, forty thousand youths into their organization on the basis of the sexual question and the mental-hygiene question, they said, "Reich is marvelous." The moment it came to doing something practical, they became enemies. Now that is crucial. As long as I brought them people, I was "wonderful." The moment they had to do something practical for people, they became hateful.
>
> ... It was quite clear. You have to establish youth centers. You have to train many physicians. You have to teach sex-economy. You have to bring human psychology into your politics. You have to do more. You have to revamp your whole way of thinking, so that you don't think from the standpoint of the state and the culture and this or that, but from the standpoint of what people need, what they suffer from. Then, you arrange your social institutions accordingly. Not the other way around. Now that is foreign to the mind of a Marxist politician today. They think in terms of the state. I think in terms of human beings and what they need. If I had anything to say politically, everything which exists would be arranged in accordance with what the child needs, the infant needs, the adolescent needs, you need, I need, everybody needs. Now, here, sociology becomes separated from politics for the first time .... So I moved out of psychoanalysis, but I moved into sociology, into the field of human mass action. Then, Freud was disappointed.
>
> ... I said that you have to distinguish the natural family, which is based on love, from the compulsory family. I said you have to do all kinds of things to prevent neurosis. And he replied, "Ihr standpunkt hat nichts mit dem mittleren Weg der Psychoanalyse zu tun". ("Your viewpoint has nothing to do with the middle way of psychoanalysis".) ... Freud was not interested in how society would go on. He was not interested in it. He only had a hope. He had the hope that Eros would make -

"wird eine Anstrengung wachen in das Unbehagen." ("Will make an effort into the discontent.") But, *practically*, "Eros-Anstrengung" means whether the womb of the mother is alive or whether it's dried out, whether or not the mother experiences sexual orgasm during embrace, and whether an old, old over-aged Judaism cuts the penis right after birth. Furthermore, whether the nipple of the mother is orgonotically charged, i.e. whether the bio-energy is functioning in that nipple, so that when the child reaches out with its oral desire, it hooks onto something which is satisfactory and not a shock.

... here, the Freud of the Victorian era contradicted the Freud who had discovered infantile sexuality. Here, perhaps, he was bound down personally. And he had had enough. He had had enough struggle. ... And he was right. Nothing can be done. Nothing can be done. But, to my mind, he gave up before he started. ... I came to the same conclusion, but only after much experience and failure. *Nothing can be done with grown-ups.* I say this as a person who is rather experienced in psychiatry and human biology. Nothing can be done. *Once a tree has grown crooked, you can't straighten it out.* And here, just in the light of this, his rejection of the prophylaxis of the neuroses was so startling to me.

... Here, I lose him, as in a fog. I think it had to do with his cancer. I can't help feeling that. He did not like people. He couldn't have any social intercourse with his students. He was cut off from social life outside. He had been very alive, and he must have suffered tremendously. Being alive, quite alive, and having to sit alone, as he sat there, is bad, very bad ... He couldn't speak. You see, he had been a marvelous speaker. His words flew clearly, simply, logically. ... And then it hit him right there in the speech organ. He had to resign. This man wanted to talk, to go out, to speak, to move. Look at his mouth, the configuration of his mouth. He wanted to go out, to do .... And that is where my interest in cancer studies began.[2]

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[2] Higgins, Mary and Chester M.Raphael, *Reich Speaks of Freud*, Noonday Press, N.Y., 1968

I guess my overall feeling about the relative irrelevance of a great deal of Reichian work is that the lesson of the danger to be incurred by genuinely dedicating one's aliveness to the kind of challenge Reich is speaking about which keeps its alive awareness of the moving center of that work, as Reich did throughout his life, has proved too much of a challenge for most people to keep that awareness as a part of their central value system. I know only a handful of writers on Reichian subjects who write in a lively manner, comparable to Reich's own style. Beyond this question of writing, I know of still fewer Reichians, or people whose work stems from that of Reich whether or not they pay him his proper due, who seem to me to reflect in their own personal lives the kind of balance between subjective and objective factors in their life-style which Reich did in his, and fewer *still* whose life work is centered on a way of life which could be characterized by a unity of personal style, area of focus, and the kind of human concern for the "little man" - the mass mental-hygiene focus which was so integral a part of Reich's entire life from beginning to end! Most Reichians I know display some of these elements, and all display at least one - the ideological adherence to the significance of Reich's life and work - but hardly any have been able to live these elements in the way of which Reich spoke.

I do not fault them on a personal level for this lack. I confess my own inability to do this as totally as I would like to in my own life! My own security in believing in a really fulfilling erotic life in my marriage has been threatened by so many disappointments, aborted efforts, and a whole gamut of

learnings about the practical difficulties of achieving this kind of genital happiness with one partner who is also the parent of one's children, that I have no wish to fault others who have encountered similar difficulties! My intent in this writing is to bring a spotlight to bear on the kinds of things that *can* be done by followers of Reich on the same practical level as his own, and to voice my suspicion that most Reichians pay too little attention to this most crucial aspect of the work!

I find it poignantly sad to realize that the most exciting, the most socially generative institutions at work in society today are not those being created by Reichians, who sometimes act as though they felt more concerned with the purity of their dogma vis-à-vis non-Reichians than with the need for new work with people!

The really exciting innovative developments in the area of maternal care in pregnancy and childbirth are being made by people like Dr.Frederick Leboyer[3] and Ina May Gaskin and her "Farm" midwives[4]. The original creative impetus for genuine change in the field of education pioneered by A.S.Neill and a few people in the United States who followed his lead has for the most part either died out or been co-opted by some individual public school systems as a safety valve for the children of the discontented, rather as John Dewey's work in

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3 Leboyer, Frederick: *Birth Without Violence*, Knopf, N.Y., 1975.

4 Ina May and The Farm Midwives, *Spiritual Midwifery*, The Book Pub.Co. Summertown, Tenn., 1975.

progressive education became co-opted by some public schools as "project-centered" curricula, and finally died out altogether.

And yet, the need for such changes, such innovations, especially in cities and among the poor, is overwhelming! And since it is in cities that Reichians tend to live and work, the lack of their presence as agents of these much-needed innovations is to me most poignant. I do not believe it is for lack of opportunity that this presence is missing. A few years ago, for example, the Fleischmann Commission, a body especially appointed by the governor of the state of New York to solicit recommendations for legislation to help achieve better standards of public education in the state, held hearings in cities all over the state which were open to anyone who wished to testify. I may be wrong, but I did not hear of any such testimony by any Reichians, in or out of the field of actually participating in some school. Yet, I cannot believe that Reich himself, offered such an opportunity, would have held back from giving what expertise he felt himself to possess in this area!

Well, they say fools rush in ... I *did* testify before the Commission, feeling foolish in the midst of so many highly qualified experts, yet believing I owed myself this debt of witness to something in which I believed very deeply! And it is my impression, from the apparently electrifying effect of my testimony on most of the people present, that I was one out of hundreds if not the *only* one they had heard who made an effort to call their attention to the kinds of criteria for recognizing and getting quality education which I did.

I spoke of the human factors involved, of the necessity of helping institutions to provide more adequate support systems for teachers, parents, and children in need, rather than give even further credence to the efficaciousness of such bureaucratic gimmickry as corporation-developed electronic teaching machines and programs, as the increased resort to compulsory testing programs, further centralization of education through the abolition of small neighborhood schools, and the establishment of more consolidated ones, and other measures designed to take control even further away from the people most deeply involved!

For my effort, I received the hearty thanks of the entire commission and full and sympathetic coverage by both T.V. and the press. But I was only one person, and certainly not a very important one. Where were the more impressive Reichians?

Of course my criticism does not apply to all Reichians equally. The orgonomists who do research in meteorology and cosmology have my deepest respect and admiration. Some Reichians work directly with entire families to help them establish healthy inter-relationships. Some carry on a continuing process of extending their understanding of the life process through their work with people. People obviously have to discover their own ways of using their lives to their maximal potential, not simply follow someone else's lead: even Reich's! But I do find it hard to have to accept the fact that so many, many of those who have in some sense been handed the torch which Reich laid down a generation ago have apparently chosen such comparatively *tame* ways of carrying it! And even that

might not be so bad to have to swallow were it not for the feeling I have that there ain't a one of those tame pussycats who wouldn't scratch me if I tried to say it to his face! In fact, I feel as though I *had* been scratched by a couple of them! And I realize I am really sticking my scrawny neck way out in saying this.

I can almost hear the reaction I would get if I were saying this to a flesh-and-blood Reichian practitioner! It would be turned back on me as indicative of some lethal defect in my character structure! Just as the Freudians and the neo-Freudians used and still use their own metapsychology to lambast and reject the Reichian challenge to their own cowardly self-aggrandizement. Perhaps it should be a matter of less moment to me that this should be the case! But I cannot swallow it! I will not swallow it! As a woman in a patriarchal society whose institutions punish and destroy the natural life-positive beauty and spontaneity of the lives of countless women and children, I cannot ignore the extent to which Reich's work is being side-tracked away from its original impact as a revolutionary challenge to the mores of the entire Western world, and back into the model promulgated by every other illusionist to whom people in trouble have brought their problems: namely, that such problems can be solved in a social, and institutional vacuum!

Reich himself saw so clearly through the veils of illusion, including the illusion of political or economic reform, that it is really hard for me to have to accept the reality of his followers' blindness to the self-serving nature of their choices -

but I am an idealist, I guess. I still keep thinking people *can* learn to love life as Reich did, to invest themselves in the perilous tasks so few can bear to tackle because he didn't shrink from it! Am I crazy to believe such a thing? The young Freud believed it, surely. Reich never stopped believing it. How can I do otherwise?

What I am saying is that it hurts me to see the extent to which the real pioneering - the cutting edge - of society's innovations for the better, seems to have passed into other hands than those of Reich's heirs. One example which has made a deep impression on me is the work of the Radical Psychiatry movement. Although the model these people use is the transactional analysis one, the roots of which are closer to Freud than Reich, the sociological implications of this movement are clearly Reichian, and even in the respects in which they are not aware of their debt to Reich, they draw either from the same sources Reich himself drew from, or from sources who owe much to the influence of Reich. These people seem to me to have remarkably clear images of the work which enables them to make equally clear distinctions between what I would call the "substance" and the "accidents" of Reich's work and thought.

Just as Reich himself saw very clearly the substance of Freud's work as opposed to the characterological quirks uncritically adopted by his disciples (sitting behind the patient, remaining silent, etc.), so these people seem to have been able to come closer to the core of the work in allowing themselves to feel very fully how it is with their clients while refusing to play

the role of authority figure or credentialized expert who has a monopoly on human contact! They have seen clearly the extent to which a therapist can become an oppressor by simply arrogating to himself the sole source of power, authority, validation, and affection for the oppressed person.

Radical therapists refuse to offer one-to-one therapy for this reason, recognizing how unfair it is to foster people's illusion that a therapist can "save" them from society's devastatingly inhuman impact. They stress again and again the necessity for seeking "liberation" by joining with other people to help find ways to change the institutions which generate these inhuman pressures. My personal regret comes from my awareness of the extent to which they fail to understand the depths of their model, to see the cultural roots in both Freud and Reich, and to widen and deepen their own awareness by making this linkage. For this gap in their understanding, I principally fault the Reichians, on two counts - one for not opening themselves more fully to that kind of mutual sharing, and second, for not taking the initiative in filling in the gap. I don't doubt that the lack is mutual, but I still regret that more effort at *rapprochement* has not been made.

It is undoubtedly true that some effort has indeed been made on the part of some Reichians to build bridges, and this needs to be said. The conference on Reich which was held in San Francisco in the summer of 1974 was most surely of this kind! Stanley Keleman, although he does not call himself a Reichian, has certainly spoken publicly on every possible aspect of Reich's work on innumerable occasions, as well as

worked with public figures whose political impact would be of some significance on the reform of public institutions. Not every act of public significance involves taking on the anathema of the most benighted aspects of the society. To the extent to which the heritage of Reich can best be served by quiet, systematic work in reaching ordinary people playing ordinary roles, I am for it! David Boadella's book, *Wilhelm Reich, The Evolution of his Work*, is one such tool. It is presently being read by medical students, college students, doctors, psychologists, social workers, and who knows how many other people who are potential sources of quiet cultural influence. It may even be true that, in the long run, such behind-the-scenes activities are more influential than more sensational challenges to the central institutions of the society. I rather believe both sorts must be made! My quarrel is with those I feel do neither!

Look. I began this writing with a warning that it was not intended primarily to be an objective piece, but rather one of allegorical and highly charged images which I hope will have some sort of immediate relevance for people open to receiving them. There is no intent on my part to denigrate *as such* what people do with their lives. It is not what they DO but what they DO NOT do to which I am attempting to point. My wish is that some degree of awareness of this lack might in some ways influence their choices of the ways in which they use their talents. I would like to end with another quotation from Reich, this one from his introduction to *The Function of the Orgasm*, 2nd Edition.

"It is to be feared that in another decade or two the school of sex-economists will split into two groups which will fight each other violently. One group will maintain that the sexual function is subordinated to the general life function, and that, consequently, it can be discarded. The other group of sex-economists will radically oppose such a contention and will try to save the honor of scientific sex research. In this struggle, the basic identity of sexual process and life process might easily be forgotten. I might give in myself, and disavow what in youthful years of struggle was honest scientific conviction. For the Fascist world may succeed again, as it did in Europe, in threatening our hard work with extinction at the hands of party politicians and moralistic psychiatrists of the hereditarian school. Those who witnessed the scandal of the Fascist press campaign against sex-economy in Norway know what I am speaking of. For this reason, it is imperative to put down in time what is meant by sex-economy, before I, myself, may begin to think differently and possibly hamper with my authority the coming generation in its search for the truth."[5] pp 27-8).

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REALITY AND THE ROSE CURTAIN ...
OWNING YOUR ANGER
from *The New Schools Exchange Newsletter*

COMMENT:

The context of this article, published in November, 1972, in Kat Marin's New Schools Exchange Newsletter, *the "voice" of the free school movement, is a response to a polarizing and quite traumatic encounter at a national meeting of free schoolers held in New Orleans between east and west coast life style advocates: the westerners, led symbolically by Michael Rossman (*The Wedding in the War*) and Peter Marin, and the northeasterners, centered around Boston and New York and led symbolically by Jonathan Kozol. In those times, it felt easier to be totally ideological, I seem to remember. The controversy centered on Jonathan's scathing remarks in his book* Free Schools *about middle class rural free schools, which he saw as at best irrelevant to a solution to the problem of America's classist and racist educational inequities, and at worst, as compounding that problem.*

One strong ingredient of the model at issue here seems to have been one which came out of the spiritually-motivated taking of LSD and mescalin à la Ken Kesey and the Hog Farmers, and the subsequent communal movement to withdraw from society and practice a variety of Buddhism which viewed anger and political radicalism as an indication of insufficient self-awareness, the implication being that one should "get his head together" before attempting to speak in public or write.

This split led quite quickly to a backing away of the "bliss bunnies" from the entire schools reform movement, leaving only the radical rump behind, which subsequently faded too, largely from having failed the economic test of autonomous survival following the "cold turkey" withdrawal of seed funds grants given for three years by various corporations. From this time until the gradual emergence of new leadership of a far less radical stripe, some years later, the new movement essentially died while still an infant, its successor, the "alternative school movement," being virtually a non-political, or better, politically naive group (with a few stunning exceptions!) whose concerns were largely practical and survival-oriented.

I seem to be using my strong love and kinship response to Jonathan Kozol as a person as a criterion by which to evaluate this growing split. The first time I saw and heard Jonathan was at Union College, lecturing on his topic, the deep sense of love and anger he felt for the poor whose lives were being so cavalierly trashed by the indifference of society. It was impossible not to feel his pain, and yet, the beauty and the passion of his feelings shone so vividly through his every word, I totally lost my heart to him! Rushing on stage afterwards, I threw my arms around him, calling him my brother. Fortunately for me, he was not daunted by this display, but responded in kind. We have been fast friends ever since, even though our paths have crossed only occasionally.

John P. [John Patenaude, editor of the "KOA Newsletter" - see below] writes me that Jonathan Kozol's book *Free Schools* came in for some heavy shit [a buzz word which was *de rigeur*

among "free schoolers" at the time] at the recent free schools conference in New Orleans. My reactions to this news are numerous and powerful. Mostly, they relate to what Larry and Michelle Cole said in their review of [Jonathan's ground-breaking book] *Free Schools* in the last KOA [Kommunications on Alternatives] Newsletter. They said it so vividly, I can only repeat what they said, for the benefit of any who missed the issue, and because it needs to be said over and over and over:

> *We are in a time when adults are running away from the problems around them and wondering while they run, panting, why the little ones are so fucked up* [another buzz word; ed.] *Some people, when they've stopped running long enough, have started up some schools as a kind of cover for their rear... The movement into purity and innocence has become the absurd luxury of the leisure class, too afraid of its own rage to look at it squarely and use the education they find so worthless and guilt provoking to make the world better... Kozol... is outraged at people,who run away... He has taken a position that it is NOT okay with him for people to go do their own thing. In the process, we understand, he has lost a lot of "friends."*
>
> *When you move from the emotional to the political, from the self-conscious to the overview, from the self-centered to the responsible, you are bound to lose a lot of friends. Junkies who try to kick find that truth every day; people they used to know and run with just don't like them anymore. Personal change, when it threatens to expose and change others, is the most dangerous virus of all. A lot of free school people like any other so called "movement" people would like to be left alone with their fantasies. Kozol speaks eloquently about their nakedness.*

One of my favorite people has always been the hypnoanalyst Robert Lindner. You never seem to hear about his stuff any more, but to me, his writings were prophetic. In his *Prescription for Rebellion*, published in 1952, and again, in *Must You Conform?*, 1956, he pointed to the epidemic growth of

sociopathy, the disease of Mass Man, a disorder of the moral dimension of the personality which renders its victim incapable of commitment, a passive mutineer with energy only for immediate gratification, without identity, and violent when the superficial stability of his self-image receives a blow he can't duck.

This to me sounds exactly like Jonathan's "some very fine and terrifying breed of alienated human beings." Like it or not, his image of the sandbox for the children of the SS guards on a hillside outside Auschwitz will be with us for a long time. And, too, 1984 is only twelve years away!

The point Jonathan, Larry and Michelle, Lindner, Orwell, and the rest of us who KNOW we are angry and are trying to harness that anger to get on with the job are saying is, I think, look, for God's sake. There is a real enemy out there. Oh, no, it's not the bureaucrat at the Welfare office who makes the policy that checks are being cut this week. It's not the landlord who refuses to panel the basement apartment where the baby eats sweet chips off the peeling walls because he expects the mother to stop the baby. Shit, it's not the clinical psychologist who confirms the principal's statement that Gary is too dangerous to be in school who's to blame. No, nor the cheapshit furniture dealer who sells that defective refrigerator to one customer after another and tries to blame them for breaking it! No, it's not the president of IT&T, or Nixon, or your own ward heeler, or the Chief of Police, or anyone else.

And that's why you get so angry, and why the anger has GOT to be owned before it can be harnessed. But you can't even

BEGIN to get on with the job of owning your anger, which is so hard it takes a lot of supportive people around you who are doing the same thing, until you can stop running away from it and turn and face it! No, not snarl at the people who blow your cover, like the Jonathans, the clear-eyed ones who see through your defenses. But turn around and take a look within at the white-hot furnace that glows and seethes and is where you, the real you, lives and comes from, comes out of.

We've had the Iron Curtain, the Bamboo Curtain, all sorts of curtains. This one, I guess, would be the Rose Curtain. People who have to wear sunglasses strike me as hiding behind it. I think the fear is that what one would find who lifted that curtain would all be nasty and cruel and frightening and ugly, like the physical surroundings of the ghetto, like the image of the rapist and the purse snatcher and the child molester and the killer who kills for the sake of killing. The curtain we drop between the suburbs and the inner city mirrors with near exactitude the actual inner split which exists within the souls of the victims of the Rose Curtain. It is as though we project a literal external image upon those we fear and then force them to conform to that image, a forcing which extends even into the souls of the dwellers within the curtain **so** that they themselves sometimes enact in their own lives - embody through the shared fantasy - the belief which was forced upon them.

And all of us are victims of the mirage, dwellers within its shadowy, rose-colored depths. Like the poor Irish peasants during the potato famine who are said to have fixed their gaze on a shriveled bit of meat under a bell jar in the center of the

table as they gnawed their last remaining bits of rotten potato, creating in their hunger-sharpened imaginations the savory taste they craved in reality, we all want to turn our eyes away from the glass shards and dog shit on the broken sidewalks, the begging eyes at dirty windows far above the street, the spilled-out garbage which lies all winter under the blackened snow and then reappears in the spring, and turn them toward apple blossoms, daffodils, the delicate tracery of spring leaves against a pale blue sky, toward everything which is lovely and lifts the spirit and away from all that is heavy and drags it down.

Furit, the therapist in *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* by Hannah Green, who is said by some to have been patterned on Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, one of my favorite models of womanhood - says to herself about Deborah, the schizophrenic girl she is working with: if only she could tell her about reality, the real world, how much better it is than the illusory one Deborah has created! I guess I'd like to say something like that to the people who are putting down Jonathan and his book. Not to have to shut out part of reality because it is painful, or ugly, or frightening, is the most wonderful experience in the world.

Whenever I find myself able to face that part of myself that wants to run away, I get such a rush of energy, such joy, such a will to summon up the courage it takes to make some inroads into one of the problems that have been lying heavy on my soul like a lump of undigested meat in my stomach! It makes all the pain, the anxiety, the worry about being rejected

by people you need approval from, all the shit it takes to stay in there and keep at the job, all that, seem trivial.

Because there is so much joy, so much life, so much pleasure in small things to be found everywhere when you can begin to enjoy it! The little girl who used to emerge from her house with a barely suppressed cry and a fist near her eye just in case, and who came down the steep steps one foot at a time, holding on fearfully — now she dances down the steps and hops into the car, giving you a joyous swat as she comes, spewing you with soggy doughnut from her mouth as she laughs at your expression. Her mother shouts out the window to you and finally appears at the door in her bathrobe, holding out a $5 food stamp, smiling and reassuring you that she can manage without it. Nothing needs to be said except friendly greeting and thanks. You are friends. She trusts you, you trust her. It makes your day!

Jesse, the bumbling, dog-faced bully twice the size nine years ought to be, Jesse who was thrown out of two classes for the emotionally disturbed and several parochial schools before that; Jesse, the boy of whom his uncle says, "We think he's the only child who was ever thrown out of Headstart," Jesse, the boy who was convicted of rape when he was five! — Jesse, who once told you that God loves everybody — dials his own home number and speaks softly into it as you stand with your arm around him, "Mamma, I can read! Yes I can, ask Mary! No, I ain't foolin' you. I read two books!" You exchange happy glances and he gives you a seraphic smile as he listens to his mother's response. Wow!

Let's see. New Orleans. Hmm. We used to live in Texas. I think they're about the same relative distance from the megapolis of the Northeast and from Cuernavaca, Mexico. I remember feeling a lot closer to Cuernavaca than to New York City in those days. Could this have any relevance to the strength of the reaction against Jonathan's book? Craig Newberger, an Antioch student who was a teacher at our school from September through December, has just arrived back from a three-month stint at CIDOC. He liked Ivan Illich very much, both as a person and as an ideologue, but said of him that he was so out of touch with the reality of American life that he would say things like, "Deschooling has become a fad, now, and nobody believes that schools will last any more."

In the sense in which he means it, i.e., the higher bullshit among "in" people at some of the universities, this is true. But it is as relevant to real life in our country as the endless conversations Jonathan mentions "about 'institutional revolution' over sirloin steaks and good red wines at small French restaurants in Harvard Square.."

It is not the persons of ideologues nor even their ideas which anger Jonathan, and which anger me. It is the frustration engendered in the face of one's recognition of the depth of the infantile illusion which truly believes that, "Where I am, here is the center of the universe." And no, the real center is not inside Ivan Illich's head, nor is it inside CIDOC in Cuernavaca, any more than it is inside the Learning Center in South Boston or the Free School in Albany or LEAPschool in New York! It is within the soul of each of us, within that part

which is a part of every living thing, and ultimately, of every atom and sub-particle within the atom and within the Universal Soul which informs each microcosm and the spaces between. We ARE a part of the whole, whether we like it or not. And must begin to find that center within us, or else we shall all truly perish!

And from Craig at CIDOC:

Dear Mary and all the Free School People,

Well, I just finished 8 weeks at the intensive Spanish School, Cale. I feel that I got a tremendous amount out of the school. I couldn't speak Spanish at all when I got here, and I can now bullshit my way through almost anything in Spanish. I've been doing a lot of hitching, and have had no problem telling jokes or having pretty good conversations in español.

I'm now at CIDOC for 3 weeks. Currently, I'm in the midst of a class called "A Philosophy for Education Reform" taught by this famous spaced-out German philosopher named Helmut Von Hentig. He has talked about Hegel, Kant, Marx, his own philosophy, you name it; but has never touched on his proposed topic. I'm also taking "Youth as a Social Category" taught by Edgar Friedenberg and "Deschooling as Method" taught by Denis Sullivan and Ivan Illich. Friedenberg is the author of Coming of Age in America *and* The Vanishing Adolescent. *Illich is the author of* Deschooling Society *and* Celebration of Awareness. *Knowing Illich has made me really against heavy intellectual theorizing. Here he is in the beautiful climate of Cuernavaca, living in a super rich mansion, making a fortune from CIDOC, and*

bullshitting with big vocabulary about abolishing schools, which has about as much chance of happening as Eldridge Cleaver has of becoming president. His ideas are great, but it would be nice if he could get down to reality. I could never take CIDOC for too long of a time, but I kind of enjoy the heavy intellectual stimulation since it is only for 3 weeks. Also, the place is a real rip-off. I could never afford to go there if Antioch wasn't paying for it. But, I'm particularly looking forward to next week when John Holt is teaching a course there, and I'd like to speak to him privately also.

Living in poverty right now is a really good experience for me, as I come from an upper-middle class family in the states. The family that I live with lives in a 2 room shack. There are 4 children and a mother and father. I really dig them especially their 3 year old girl. Whenever I pronounce a word wrong, she repeats it for 5 minutes and laughs like it is the funniest thing in the world. I am constantly taking her with me where I go, giving her horse rides on my neck. I find that poor people tend to be much more down to earth than rich people. They don't build all the communication barriers that rich people do. I really love my Mexican family. I also found that the Spanish I've learned from them has well complemented what I learned at school.

Dear Mary and the Free School people,

Well, I've just about finished my 12 week academic quarter in Mexico. I'll be leaving Cuernavaca on Wednesday for over 2 months of travel throughout Mexico and Central America for my co-op period.

I really dug living with my Mexican family. They are poor Zapotec Indians (although they speak Spanish fluently). They had spent most of their lives living in Oaxaca, and they just moved to Cuernavaca a few weeks before I moved in with them. They are always so fucking happy about every little thing. It was really a far-out experience living with people with so much enthusiasm.

My past 4 weeks were spent at CIDOC. My attitude towards Ivan Illich has changed a lot, and I have grown to respect him a great deal. There are a lot of rumors circulated throughout CIDOC about Ivan being a man of many contradictions, practically all of which aren't true. It turns out that all of the money paid to CIDOC goes back into the upkeep of the place, and Ivan doesn't make any of it. Also, he lives in one room in the CIDOC Casa Blanca, and everything he owns could easily fit into a small suitcase, with the exception of his books. While I originally fell for the rumor that Ivan was ripping off the people, I now see him as an extremely dedicated and committed person. However, he is a hard person to talk to, for his thinking is always way up in the clouds. He can't even get down to reality enough to do something as simple as getting dressed properly, and it's not unusual to see him wearing one shoe, with his zipper down, and his shirt buttoned in the strangest way. Anyway, he really believes in what he is doing and saying; and he has some outasight ideas, if only people would act on them.

Edgar Friedenberg proved to be a real asshole. He taught a course called "Youth as a Social Category" which dealt with how young people are kept as a discriminated minority group. He gave a brilliant and very revealing analysis of the situation, but

when I asked him the question which nobody at CIDOC ever dares to ask, "What can be done about it?" he replied by saying, "Frankly, I don't give a damn." Apparently, he spends his life making money writing books about what is wrong, but never offering alternatives.

Anyway, meeting John Holt, in itself made going to CIDOC an extremely worthwhile and meaningful experience for me. A lot of CIDOC people didn't dig John, because he isn't as intellectual as most of the people who lead seminars there, but that made me like him all the more. He led a seminar called "A New Society, Some Rough Sketches" which basically dealt with what would be the shape of an alternative society, as John called it, "smart city," where children could just walk down the streets and learn things, and schools wouldn't exist. However, the course wasn't all utopian speculation, for most of it dealt with practical proposals to bring us from where we are to where we want to be. I was also in an encounter group in which John also participated, and he brought out all kinds of fascinating points. I was able to make pretty good contact with John during his stay at CIDOC, and he offered me a job as director of an adventure playground in the U.S. (there are already several in Great Britain and Scandinavia.)

John hopes that the adventure playgrounds will eventually serve as an alternative to the schools, but, at least for now, it is the most viable thing the city has to offer. I wrote Peggy Hughes, who also works in John's office on Boylston Street in Boston and is involved in setting up the playground, mainly asking a lot of questions. The job is still pretty indefinite for they might want to hire someone from the neighborhood, and I'm not sure how to

work it out as far as Antioch is concerned. Anyway, John is going to recommend me for the job, if it looks like it is right for me. We'll see what happens.

As for now, I'm getting ready to get on to the road and do some traveling. Mexico has become a place which really means a lot to me. Man, the more you travel abroad, the more you realize how rotten the United States. is. Everything is going great with me. Have a right-on-spring. See you in June.

Hasta la vista,

Craig

THE FREE SCHOOL CONTROVERSY:
A Letter from America
from *Energy & Character*

A couple of Saturdays ago, my son Mark and I visited Lewis-Wadhams, Herb Snitzer's "Summerhill" school in the Adirondack Mountains, three hours' drive north of Albany. We spent the day walking around the grounds, chatting with students and teachers, and even managed an hour of conversation with Herb, deep as he was in conference with parents. Much of our talk was about the current controversy over the significance of alternative schools, in which Herb, as the head of one of the oldest and most successful schools of its kind in the country, plays an active role. This letter grows out of that conversation. It deals with my own thoughts about "free schools" and their relationship to education in general more than with what Herb had to say, since it is never safe to try to characterize another person's views. Of course, since what he had to say became the stimulus for my views, he may feel that he is being represented by me as advocating or attacking something he does not, and for this, I accept the onus.

The dialogue over free schools in the United States has had its most potent shot in the arm from a book by Jonathan Kozol entitled *Free Schools*, in which the author makes a pretty fundamental criticism of the people who have started such schools in what he persistently calls "the green hills of Vermont" as "some fine and very terrifying breed of people" akin to the families of SS guards at Auschwitz setting up sandboxes for their children within sight and smell of the

smoking chimneys of the gas chambers. This is pretty strong language, and has upset a lot of people a great deal, including Herb Snitzer.

I guess I am concerned about a lot of things. Like Herb, my principal concern is for people - for the people who are engaged in carrying on this kind of education as an example of what is possible in the way of life-positive experience for children. I am concerned about Herb's feeling of being ruled out as worse than irrelevant - as downright immoral! And about the children who attend these country schools, and the quality of experience they are having. In some degree I can understand his feeling that such violent attacks on the free school movement may hurt the image the public has of alternative education.

But my concern is equally for Jonathan and for the people he feels he is speaking for. Jonathan is a man of deep feelings and sensitivity whose sense of injury is too real to be ignored. He feels personally the fate of the small black (and white) ones who grow up stunted and ill as a result of the massive cruelty and indifference of society. He speaks, not in generalities, however, but in particulars. He speaks of Peter, a boy who was too tiny ten years ago, and who has hardly grown since. And of a girl he took to Boston City Hospital suffering from epileptic convulsions whom he saw treated with total lack of caring, without even the medication to control her seizures, let alone a beginning of the education she needs to learn how to live with her condition. The chief target of his indignation is the doctors who shrug their shoulders and turn away their eyes

when asked to play a role in the lives of these children. "The mother probably didn't have good pre-natal care, " they answer indifferently, as though this was an adequate reason for their current neglect! He calls the syndrome "D and D": diagnose and dismiss.

My concern is for the extent to which the ways in which we look at the attitudes of the people toward whom we feel such a deep sense of personal response, a response so deep as to amount virtually to a sense of personal injury, and at the very least, outrage for the extent to which such feelings arise out of our own emotional needs for confirmation and for the extent to which the model of human life upon which we draw gets involved in those feelings. Beyond the purely personal dimension of my concern is the larger question to which I have yet to find a satisfactory answer: is it *possible* to live a life, play a role, to BE a human being in the fullest sense of the word in a society which functions to oppress very large numbers of human beings, not randomly but systematically?

Reich got himself ejected from Freud's Vienna Circle by refusing to confine his therapeutic and biological insights about people to middle class people, didn't he? I suppose this is a gross oversimplification of the facts, but I feel quite sure his Communist affiliation and personal involvement with governmental action on behalf of lower-class families on a mass basis were experienced by Freud as a personal affront.

I guess I feel that Leslie Shepard [a contributor to *Energy & Character* who had written article describing the "human potential movement" in California as ungrounded and

potentially dangerous] in criticizing the whole impact of the California "instant enlightenment" movement, with its hydra-headed manifestations, some valid, others sensational or worse, just plain crappy! - the "freak" culture, the "feelers and touchers", the yoga nuts who use meditation as a drug to avoid reality, the "bliss bunnies" of the Transcendental Meditation movement (the "turner-onners"), as Fritz Perls used to call them (yes, and all too often the commune dwellers and the free school kid lovers) - in all this, is touching on something that needs to be said in characterizing much of this development as cheap and unreal. What I feel he doesn't say, but which to me underlies his criticism, is that it all rests on a base of inhumanity and indifference to mass pain. Or, put more objectively, it contains the very same *inequalities* as every other society which came before, only on a scale of distribution which is new in history, whose characteristics embrace the paradoxical rejection of the ordinary life style which has in the past been associated with wealth, so that on the surface it looks like a classless pattern.

Since I am myself an active participant in the free school movement and count myself a personal friend of Jonathan Kozol's, as well as a sharer of his concerns, my concern is also with the extent to which people like us are likely to be repudiated as "sick" or as "armored" or as having some other characterological defect which explains our "hostility" toward pro-life educationists whose involvement is with exclusively upper middle class or middle class families,

and who see some significance in their ignoring of the economic aspects of personal life in an industrial society.

I suppose the heart of the problem is that Jonathan Kozol is really saying that people who settle for a purely private view of life, people for whom "No man is an island" has such limited application as to be almost meaningless, are themselves "sick". His friend Larry Cole, who teaches at the LEAP School in New York City, (The Lower East Side Project School) and who becomes enraged by the people who criticize Jonathan, saying "These people who run, and who found free schools as they run and then ask themselves why the little ones are so fucked up.... " is in effect calling them bad parents and bad teachers who "fuck up" kids. This is bound to anger anyone who, like Herb Snitzer, knows the depth of emotional commitment and devotion it takes to found, run, and nurture a school and the kids therein, whose whole life, like Larry's, like Jonathan's, like mine, is centered in that life's work.

As Herb told me, we all have our pain, and we all try to become as fully human in the face of that pain as we can! I think most of us recognize and avoid the sort of person who follows the latest fad or popular movement simply because it touches the periphery of his awareness at the moment, but who will doubtless turn to something new when it presents itself, and will turn his back on the people he cultivated as a part of "doing his thing" while it was happening. As Jonathan himself says, all his friends who used to walk in civil rights marches, then went off to the Peace Corps, are now teaching at Harvard or farming in British Columbia. When he sees them, they ask

him, "Whatever happened to that skinny little black kid, Peter?" And he has to answer them, "He's still there, and he's still malnourished, still stunted." Well, so is Jonathan still there, alone. And that smarts!

I myself am a Unitarian. In 1967, I was the chairman of our Social Responsibilities Committee, and worked in the inner city with black people for a year. My school grew partly out of that experience, and out of my awareness of the overwhelming need for life-positive, community-centered institutions in the inner city to counteract the growing inhumanness of the environment there being created by the complex of factors involved in the decay and slow death of cities. I counted, the other day - and I believe four members of our congregation, including the minister, have set foot in the school. Most ignore it. The ones who don't are overwhelmingly critical of its philosophy. That smarts too! And I don't think this indifference can be accidental - or even incidental! One person's pain at rejection by his peers is another person's "hostility" or "militancy" or "neuroticism". The one who is being labelled in some way constitutes a threat *simply by what he represents* to the labeller's sense of goodness and humanness.

My concern for this sort of emotional "You're-anotherism" extends right into the heart of the whole issue of the impact of institutions upon individuals, and vice versa. I believe we set up our institutions, consciously or unconsciously, because of our vulnerability to hurt and our need to protect ourselves against being its victims. Only, what we end up doing, I believe, is to transpose the origins of the danger in such a way

as to result in pedagogical environments for children which are the worst possible combination of factors intended to protect from injury. Consider, for a minute.

We take for granted the need to protect little ones from traumas of all kinds. We ourselves do not want to be hurt, and it is natural to want to protect helpless little people from their even greater vulnerability, physical and psychic. We want the environment in which they grow up to be safe and nourishing, to encourage them to flourish and blossom, to become themselves. We all want that for children!

So what do we do? We take away all possible sources of physical danger in our schools. We set up rules whose intent is to keep them from harming themselves, on the basis of our assumption that if "even" adults have self-destructive moments, surely we must not assume that children may not be even more reckless, given their unguarded freedom. This seems, so the legend goes, minimal common sense.

To this basic framework we add the equally universally accepted corollary that children left to their own devices will kill one another off. This is the myth which forms the basis of the book *Lord of the Flies*. Thus, we adults assign to ourselves the compulsory role of full-time policemen, regulating the affairs of children as though they had no will to regulate their own affairs.

These are assumptions which people like Neill and Herb Snitzer have helped us to see through for the inanities that they are, based on an absurd model of childhood or worse. But it is my belief that the same kinds of assumptions about people and

the need to avoid the danger that they may hurt one another - and particularly, that they may hurt children - are being made in schools like Summerhill and Lewis-Wadhams, undoubtedly on an equally non-conscious level, when they establish the ground rules of the institution in such a way as to reinforce people's fears that children can only find a secure and satisfying educational environment in a school which a) pre-selects its staff for "emotional health"; b) establishes its chief headquarters in the country away from the destructive influence of life-negative parents and other such people; c) operates on the assumption, whether tacitly or overtly, that it takes a certain level of economic input to keep the whole enterprise afloat, whether that input be private or public.

I hope it is clear that I am not equating any institution which operates on the basis of any of these assumptions as *ipso facto* guilty of denying children some essential ingredient in their developmental environment. I guess what I am saying is that it is important for educators to begin looking at excess baggage aboard the educational enterprise if it can be shown that this baggage saddles us with irrelevant assumptions which make it harder for us to solve the problem of unequal schooling for children belonging to different classes. I am suggesting that the liberating experiences Neill has given us as his heritage be extended into even further reaches of our common cultural background so that we may begin to make necessary discriminations between substance and accident such that education can be freed up to to the job of bringing the classes

closer together instead of making the gap even wider than it has been in the past.

Take the issue of pre-selection of staff people who are to be accepted for the roles of teaching in free schools. Let us say that it goes without saying that you want people in your school who, first and foremost, want to teach there - and, beyond this, who are sufficiently intelligent and creative to have something to offer children. The people you want to rule out are the ones who, in addition to having these qualities are also patently "hung up" in some way that makes them relatively out of touch, inhuman. There's nothing wrong with such a criterion, obviously. But to find people who are not hung up or contactless is to find people whose emotional stability plus these other desirable qualities make them eminently employable in any school or any other job or profession, for that matter! And so, with rare exceptions, such people will gravitate towards the schools which, by salary level or by attractiveness of living conditions - i. e., a plant which reflects MONEY - meets their standards. It is for this reason that I define elitism in terms that involve funding from whatever source, not simply from high tuition or location in the country.

This problem of elitism turns out to have increasingly far-reaching implications for the entire educational enterprise, the more you look into it. Suburban public schools are obviously elite, by virtue of their elite location. Even Lewis-Wadhams, with its charmingly open, naively democratic atmosphere in which very little distinction is made between students and staff, big people and little people - everyone being

given his due and listened to quite seriously - is an extraordinarily elite environment for children, quite out of touch with the real world which surrounds it! It protects its children from ugly people, from desperate people, from want, from people who are culturally different, from danger, from anxiety, from indifference, from violence, from everything which is other than ideal and beautiful!

What's wrong with that? Well, we don't do it. At least, not in principle. We work on the assumption that by and large, children have their own priorities, and that one had better be pretty sure intervention is warranted. We believe that trauma comes from exposure to a situation in which a child has no power of redress, for some reason or another, and that the cure for this is for a child to discover his own power to retaliate after the fact. This may sound violent, but in practice it works in the opposite manner. Children who know they have the right to take action to defend themselves learn surprisingly quickly to do this in a non-violent way. The process of learning this usually involves a few pretty violent battles, but except for a few children whose defenses against helplessness have rendered them so impervious to direct learning that they seem unable to resolve their sadistic or masochistic needs, most children seem to "pass through" the battling stage quite quickly to a new state of balance and relaxation.

I heard at Lewis-Wadhams that the children got pretty hysterical over the infrequent fire drills they have, especially after they had had a series of fires set by a messed-up kid. Well, I don't think that could happen at our school. We have an

inviolable rule that anyone can ring the firebell - which sits permanently available to even the littlest kid on a radiator in the big room - and that this is a signal for everyone to pile out of the building, shoes or no, shirt or no, big ones carting little ones, out we all come and down to the corner! Sometimes three times a day when the fever hits! Laughing, crying, cursing, skipping, as the mood varies, and according to the degree of interruption experienced.

I guess we believe in the process of immunizing against all the bad things life has to throw at kids by letting them experience some of it, but in a safe environment, so it doesn't make them ill. We let kids have a lot of physical freedom. Sometimes I simply have to turn my head away when our thirteen-months-old staff daughter starts down our very long, steep staircase by herself, even though I know she will make it with ease and grace! Or when I see eight-year old Jimmy teetering on the edge of our shed roof, with a concrete slab 12 feet below, manipulating a rope he is using to carry out some scheme he is engaged in. But I keep firmly in mind my experience at Acoma Pueblo in New Mexico in 1957, where little Indian kids ran swiftly and surely up and down the "hand trail" which descended the sheer cliff of the mesa, excusing themselves for brushing by us, engaged as we were in clinging desperately to our shallow hand and footholds as we made our laborious way downward.

Comparing with Herb, I find we tend to keep on even severely damaged kids far longer than L-W does. We had one boy last year who drove us all bananas, for months! We finally

voted to remove one article of his clothing, beginning with his pants, for every actionable anti-social act he committed! (He ran all the way home across the town in his "long johns", but his behavior began to moderate from then on.) He had been thrown out of Head-Start at the age of five, and out of every program for the emotionally disturbed he had been in from then until he came to us. He killed his puppy and burned his uncle's house down during the year he was with us. But we agreed that his behavior was warranted (i.e., in one sense of the word). And the only reason we didn't keep him on another year was that his mother took him out. Some children *seem* accursed. But that doesn't seem reason enough to us to isolate him from his kind. And I cannot see any evidence whatsoever of any damage suffered by any of the other kids as a result of Jesse's having been in our school for six months. Oh, it was a tremendous relief to have him gone! But I was talking about *damage*.

What I am getting at is the extent to which we excuse elitist practices on the basis of various educational and other shibboleths which we invoke as necessary for children's healthy growth. I am not saying that a lot of educational environments are not damaging to children. I am saying that in an environment in which it is taken for granted that children can and will learn how to protect themselves, most of the techniques usually alleged as needed for children turn out to unnecessary. And that free schools are as guilty as any other schools of excusing what they do "for children" as a cover for their own fears and rigidities about cultural dissimilarity.

Children need emotional directness and honesty. They need affection. They need independence. They need stimulation. They very much need joy, joy of their own finding and making. And they need the freedom to learn how to find and make that joy. The rest, they can make do with or without.

On the basis of this kind of evidence which we feel we have concerning children's real educational and environmental needs, it seems to me as though both Herb Snitzer and the people he seems to speak for - and Jonathan Kozol and HIS people - are unnecessarily exercised over the issue of pathology as an explanation for people's relative inhumanity toward one another. There is obviously a quantum leap in the kinds of criteria one has to point to in speaking about institutions rather than people in the assessment of motivation - and still another quantum leap in speaking about institutions which arise directly out of the power source of the society as opposed to institutions which operate on the periphery of that society.

But I still believe that these differences are of degree rather than of kind, and that, to the extent to which they can be dealt with as such, they can still be set in a context which is primarily human, and so amenable to human solutions rather than being relegated to a kind of devil theory of explanation in which the only solution is total annihilation. I hesitate in making such a statement on the basis of its similarity to the kind of liberal meliorism which, by its temporizing privatism has made the solution to our societal problems so much more impossible than they need have been by their insistence that what we needed was an improvement of what we have rather

than a replacement of some institutions by other institutions. I intend to go on classing myself as a revolutionary - but I reserve the right to try and pin down false identifications of the two kinds of ideologizing where I seem to be hearing them.

And what I seem to be hearing free school people in this country saying about one another, using epithets drawn from the therapeutic disciplines as the ammunition for their charges of inhumanity, seems to me about as paradoxically inhuman - by which I mean simply silly and infantile - as you can get! We need each other very much. We need to cherish each other. Let's get on with it.

Photo by Dave Brickman, Albany Times-Union photographer

The Free School

Denizens of The Free School in 1977

Photo by Mickie McCormic

SHOESTRING SCHOOL
from *The Journal of Orgonomy*

COMMENT

This article appeared in the May, 1977 issue of the Journal of Orgonomy, *the Reichian journal which publishes the work coming out of the College of Orgonomy. Its editor, Dr. Elsworth Baker, was one of Reich's most sensitive and loyal colleagues, and was the one chosen by Reich to carry on his work. I consider it an honor for my writing to have appeared in this publication. The story of how that happened is perhaps significant, both for my outlook at the time and for Dr. Baker's as well.*

In 1975 and 1976, I was still sort of entranced by Reich. I had just finished over two years of orgonomic therapy with Mort Herskowitz in Philadelphia, and was feeling wonderfully sane and full of energy! I had built an accumulator and was dying to know whether or not the cloud-buster was for real. That thing (and the work of Reich himself!) sure seems to attract nutty people. It's only now that I can look back and acknowledge how nutty I was! Anyhow, I drove to Rangeley from my family's house in Brunswick, Maine, where we were vacationing, arriving at Orgonon, Reich's observatory and laboratory on the mountaintop, just as the Rosses, the caretakers, were leaving for lunch. They asked me to wait till they got back. Well, I was very excited, a bit scared and also very curious in a naughty kid sort of way, and ran up the driveway to the top shortly after the pickup drove out of sight.

In those days, the huge, science-fictiony cloud-buster was still hooked up to its well beneath the platform. I cannot tell a lie! I turned it on, and sat down to wait, my heart pounding wildly. In about a minute or two, a wind came up, and suddenly, I saw two blue holes in the grey overcast! Whew! Even scareder, I quickly put the whole thing back down, ran down the driveway, and had just closed the door of my car and was sitting sedately behind the wheel as the pickup came down the road again! So far, so good. But I couldn't keep it to myself, so I wrote Neill about it. He sent my letter on to Baker - quite properly! That thing can be damned dangerous, and I didn't know what I was doing!

So next thing I knew, I got a letter from Baker saying Neill had written him, and asking me who I was, how I happened to have written Neill. Well, I answered, mentioning my orgonomic therapy and describing the school in some detail. That's when he wrote back and asked me to write the article on the school which follows, and I was very touched and pleased that he had been able to pick up my style.

The writing took a year, partly because of my lack of organizational ability with articles, but also because Lois Wyvell, then the managing editor, took it upon herself to revise it for me, on several grounds, including organization! So I only take partial credit for the result. I should perhaps add that Lois was and is a stickler for orthodox Reichian doctrine, and so, several times asked me to reformulate some of my descriptions of our ways of doing to fit a more 'Reichian' vocabulary than the

one I ordinarily use. I hope the reader can see through this filter to the reality of what was going on at the time.

Shoestring School is the name given us by a reporter whom I had asked to do an article on The Free School. It was not exactly designed to further our enterprise! But in the seven years of the school's precarious existence in Albany's South End, a poor, mixed Italian and black neighborhood, such experiences have been common. Strive as we might (and have!) for recognition and funding from various sources, somehow we always seem to fall between all stools. Rather than actually suffering rejection by the general public, the recurring pattern is lack of recognition because of a dearth of easily recognizable categories in which to pigeonhole our school.

I have come to believe that this relative lack of "success" in financial and status terms has played a very important role in our school's development by forcing us to become increasingly flexible and resourceful as a means of survival. It may indeed be that our most valuable offering to the children and their families is this very quality of learning how to survive, and to survive well and fully, on terms society has never fully recognized.

Our school was founded in 1969 as a way of offering children a life-positive alternative to the public schools of Albany, New York. Having five children of my own, I had become acutely aware of the devastating effect these schools were having upon my two youngest children and their friends. We began with our children meeting in my own house. At the

end of that school year, the children and I made a serious decision to expand our efforts and invite in families who would and could pay for their children's schooling, and to rent a building to house the enterprise.

The story so far could be duplicated indefinitely in places all over the country where alternative schools, to some degree resembling A. S. Neill's Summerhill, were being established during that time in our country's history when hope and bitterness mingled in a flush of foolish romanticism and equally harmful institutionalism.

Two unlikely factors in our case made a significant difference in the story of our little institution. One of them was my choice of the inner city as the site for the school. The other factor was that Bruce Loveys, a young man in his late twenties who had become disillusioned with public school teaching, elected to join our enterprise. We had compatible views of life and learning, and considerable experience with the actualities of teaching, and we also shared a passion for institution-building. Our character structures meshed in such a way that each of us has functioned to enhance the strengths and correct the biases and failings of the other. So our little community has had both a "father" and a "mother" who are not rigidly authoritarian. I believe our school and our community are as good an example of work democracy as one could find.

Let me first describe the atmosphere of the school, what a visitor would experience walking through our door. The building itself is old and drab, just as the reporter said it was, in spite of our efforts to paint the walls gay colors and decorate

Photo by Mickie McCormic

Morning meeting

Photo by Mickie McCormic

Dylan conducting

them freely with children's multicolored drawings. The floors are usually pretty messy. Our chicken coop smells pretty stinky. So do our mouse cages. There are quite a few rickety pieces of furniture around, as well as some sturdy ones, so there is an air of relatively advanced dilapidation, except for the kitchen, which is always immaculate. But the children!

Before school starts every morning, kids wander around in pairs, heads together, absorbed in some private conversation. Others talk excitingly with one or another of the teachers about something, while others feed the animals. Some run and chase. Others climb and jump over and over. The place is a beehive! All morning long, children and adults are busy, busy, busy. There is much touching, sitting on laps, hugging, many heads bent over some project, book, or puzzle, a lot of excited conversation, kids teaching multiplication tables to one another, writing on the blackboards together, figuring things out together, teachers part of every little group, but only one member.

Lunch is a daily EVENT. Everyone interested in what everyone else is eating. Much trading of food. Much going up for seconds. Much conversation about the adequacy of the seasoning. A social event par excellence. After lunch, again the little groups assemble, some doing crafts work, or carpentry in the woodshop, or dancing to recorded music upstairs, or tumbling on the mattresses or jumping on the mini-tramp, or watching a movie downstairs, or climbing our mulberry tree in the back yard, or swinging on the swing. Or just sitting and watching everyone else. If John Dewey is right, that a school is

not a preparation for life but is life itself, then we are a school. We are certainly a place of life!

The Children and Families Served

At present, we have forty children in school, about evenly divided between pre-school and elementary school age. The mixture of middle and lower-class children is about even, and, racially, they are remarkably evenly proportioned among white, black, interracial, and Hispanic. Over half come from the immediate neighborhood of the school. The rest we bus in. I suppose the reason I consider this remarkable is the fact that none of this distribution was planned in any way. We accept anyone who wants to come, adult or child. It just happened.

About one-third of our families pay some tuition, although for some this is a very small token amount. A few have been with us since the beginning, but it has been only within the last couple of years that we have learned how to help parents understand us well enough to trust us with their children for more than two years. Since the process we envision for our children entails three or more years, it is very gratifying that the trend is in this direction.

To give a clearer picture of our impact upon the children and their families, perhaps an example would help. Four years ago, we accepted Joscelyn L., age three, into our pre-school department. Her mother is Sicilian-American, her father black. Joscelyn has four siblings. At the time, her two older siblings were enrolled in a parochial school. The following year, the mother asked us to enroll John Boy, age eight, and Tina, age

seven, in our school, having been told that unless she could pay tuition, her children could no longer go to the parochial school. We accepted them. The following year, Stephanie, age two, Joscelyn's younger sister, was enrolled, and the year after that, her brother Tony, also age two.

The reason for the early enrollment of the latter two children is significant. Stephanie had a whole cluster of problems including chronic diarrhea, high lead level, severe strabismus, severe speech impediment, possible retardation, poor dietary habits, poor resistance against infection, head lice, worms, and general evidence of neglect. Tony was just out of the hospital for refusal to eat, dehydration, and strong suspicion of "retardation, autism, infantile schizophrenia or brain damage," diagnoses made by a whole battery of doctors whose findings were nonetheless vague and not definite. The two older children were considerably behind in their grade placement in reading and resisted our efforts to help them. The mother, Gloria, was at her wits' end, having been unable to get enough money to support her family, since her husband, a construction worker, was out of work most of the winter, not being a member of the union.

Having been turned down by the Welfare Department, she could find no legitimate work. During that winter, she would come into the school several times a week with various injuries—black eye, broken foot, broken arm—either inflicted by her husband or acquired when she fell downstairs while intoxicated. She spent most of her energy that year struggling to

stay on top of her life, not to be drowned by it. We played an important role in that struggle.

Four years later, this family is still together, although they still have terrible battles when things get tough. John Boy reads well and with pleasure, and has become a competent, strongly self-respecting member of our community. He, among the few long-term kids in the school, plays the role of natural leader when decisions are in order at our council meetings. His art work is the pride of the school. Our new school flag is his design. Tina's chronic rage has begun to ebb, and she has finally begun taking pride in her work, which has improved considerably. Joscelyn, for several years totally unable to learn, has suddenly opened up and begun to gallop through her classes.

Stephanie, now five, is in many ways the most appealing member of the family. Her "gik, gak, gook" talking has vanished entirely except in moments of extreme stress. Her eyes only go askew when she feels "put down." Most of the time, she looks right at you. Her sense of humor is delightful, and her sense of herself is tremendous. She herself gets as much pleasure in contemplating her "former self" as any of the rest of us. Her whole face sparkles; her blue eyes dance with fun. She jigs and dances her way through the day, and has already begun to take an interest in school. Her health is excellent. Her hair, once straw-like and crusted, is now shiny and clean. Her plate is always polished at the end of each meal. She is a great kid, and very motherly toward younger kids, which I suppose is her

Photo by Michele McCormick

Bruce and Stephanie

Tony

way of redressing the off-balance mothering pattern she has experienced in her family.

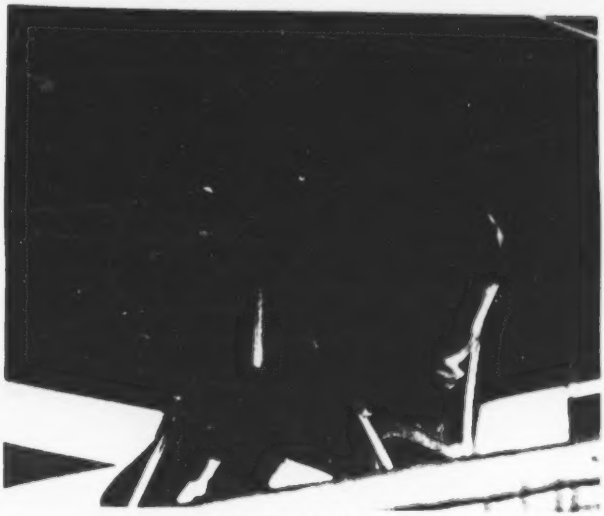
Tony, now nearly four, has presented a more difficult problem, one on which we have been working very hard with considerable success considering its enormity. At the age of two, for several weeks, he refused to eat or even to drink from a bottle, so he had to be hospitalized. Since then, we have travelled a long road together, working hand-in-hand with several community agencies. Tony goes to an "early learning center" in the morning, where he receives training in the patterned behavior and experiences which he lacked: first, creeping, manipulating various toys, and clapping his hands; then, walking, climbing, eating solid food, responding to various signals, and finally, feeding himself with a spoon and imitating sounds. We give him the same kind of experiences in the afternoon.

It has been necessary to train him to make these responses because his only spontaneous responses had been either self-stimulating (rocking, waving his hand in front of his eyes and watching the visual patterns it made, or listening to rhythms and keeping time to them) or self-punishing (slapping himself on the side of the head and screaming). Although he is now comfortable in walking around, even running a bit, rather like a little wind-up toy, and even occasionally offers a verbal response spontaneously, everything he does still has a robot quality about it that sets him apart from the others. He does enjoy life a great deal, however, and obviously understands what we say to him.

His sense of joy and tragedy are extreme, so his life is anything but boring! His face will sometimes light up with the most ecstatic smile I have ever seen. His laugh is totally catching when something tickles his fancy, and when he is angry or frightened, his howls can be heard for blocks. Whether he will ever attain much more than a very elementary level of functioning is questionable, however.

The mother still flies into fits of uncontrollable rage, usually set off by some suspicion that one of her children is being mistreated. I well remember one episode last winter when she came into the school roaring in a voice audible over the entire school that someone had hidden her son's coat. She flew at me when I tried to tell her that he himself had lost it, and began pulling out my hair and hitting my head against the wall. I managed to keep my cool until her rage subsided enough for her to listen to me and to pull herself together again. She was then able to cry, and finally to tell us what had been happening that day, and I was able to give her comfort and affection.

Since she lives her life in a way that makes anger virtually unavoidable, this rage is a chronic problem, and she pays heavily for it, suffering from severe high blood pressure. At least she knows that no one in the school will take reprisals against her for giving way to it, and she knows also very well that her children are thriving with us. So we consider the relationship a good one. When she is too angry to be effective, we also function for her as an ombudsman with various agencies with which she has to deal. For the past year, the rage



Junie as Moviemaker,
Filming Graduation Exercises

Mark and Cain at Morning Exercises

Peppy

Sam

Michio and Robin

Shadow

seems to have been less uncontrollable, so we believe she, too is changing gradually.

This family is by no means unusual in the number of problems that beset it. The details are different, but the destructive effect of the environment is universal. It is humbling to us that so many poor people are able to retain as much humanity as they do in the face of such adverse conditions. Chiefly, we are grateful when one of these severely stressed families will allow us to play as decisive a role in helping them to turn themselves around as this family has done. It does not always happen.

Schooling—Formal Classes and Other Learning Experiences

We have at present around forty kids from the ages of one year (one baby) to fourteen (a boy who has just graduated). We have a full program covering the entire pre-school through elementary school curriculum, with provisions for remedial work where required, so that all of our kids learn to operate academically at or above their grade level. We take formal education very seriously and judge our relative success as a school first and foremost in terms of our success in helping kids learn to read, write, and cipher! We are visited every year by School Board representatives, who always leave very pleased.

The formal learning of academic skills takes place in the morning in class settings. Kids and teachers alike determine which students go where. Once a week, the teachers hold meetings to review the progress being made by the children

and to make recommendations for possible changes, but any proposed change comes about only with the approval of the people involved. We follow the general notion of individual progress by each child at his own rate and more or less in his own way, if he prefers one way over another

We bring in as rich a variety of "ways," both of materials and experiences, as we can find. Kids help with cooking and learn to shop for food in the grocery store and to read recipes, as well as to figure out amounts of food necessary to feed fifty people and to prepare that food in palatable form and on time. These activities flow back into the formal process and enhance it. Since we have finally become eligible for free textbooks on loan from the city, we now offer kids a rich variety of very attractive reading books, since the term "textbook" includes any book one might use to encourage reading, as well as actual textbooks.

Competence in the playing of various social roles is the chief incentive we offer, and the formal skills are a means to that end, as well as being a source of intrinsic satisfaction. Thus, we offer "licenses" for such proficiencies as animal husbandry or cooking, and as mimeograph operator, movie projectionist, or wheel potter. The standards for these licenses are consistently high, and their acquisition is a serious matter. The rewards in the way of recognition and a feeling of responsibility are equally high, and the kids take them very seriously and work hard to get them. We put out a weekly newspaper at which the kids work hard too. The number of seven- and eight-year-olds who can read on a fifth- or sixth-

Photo by Mickie McCormic

New Silk-screened T-shirts

Abra, Joselyn, Jimmy, Cain, Tina, Kathleen, James, John Boy

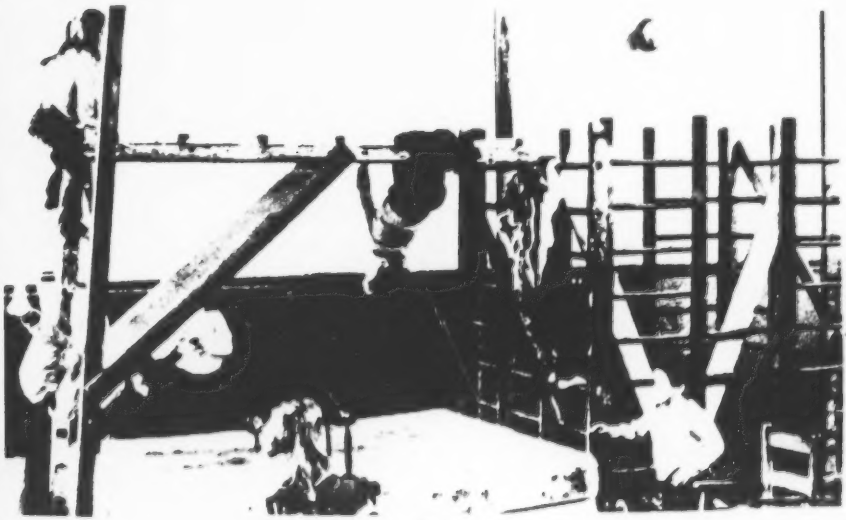
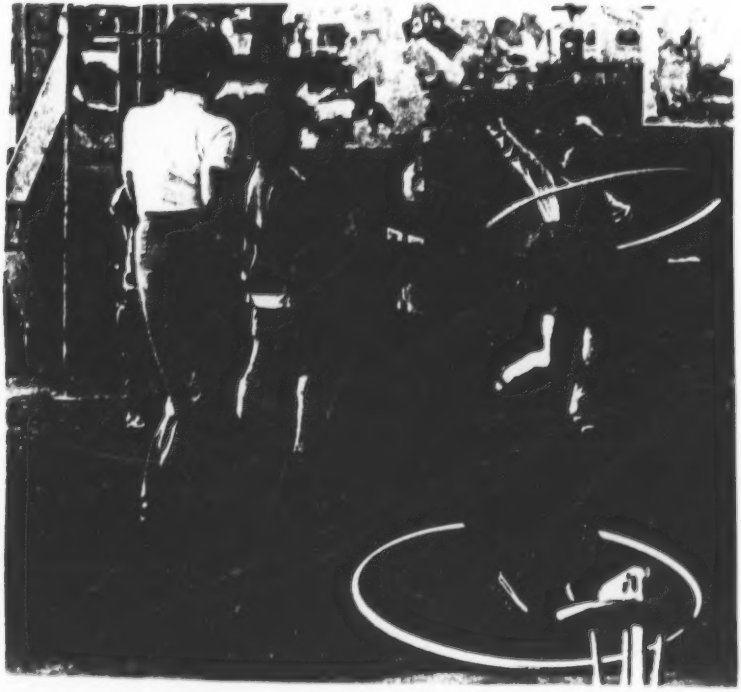


Photo by Mickie McCormic

Jungle Gym Time

A Variety of "Big Room" Activities

Kaleb and Ray Doing Their Thing



Hula Hoops
More "Big Room" fun

grade level and know their multiplication tables, who can cook a meal or take complete responsibility for our chickens, rabbits, mice, and our boa - and generally function well and responsibly, is well above the average for most schools, I am quite sure.

In addition to the usual offerings of a progressive school environment—color, pattern, manipulative media, pets, paints, blocks, toys, dolls, climbing, running, balancing, and nest-building equipment—we offer the children an opportunity to work through their encounters uninterrupted by adults (except on rare occasions when it is evident that there is mutual lack of contact) . They wrestle, challenge one another verbally, develop all sorts of coordination skills, use tools, and generally take responsibility for a wide variety of roles. They sign up for afternoon activities with the teacher who is offering the activity that appeals to them. Some dance or do tumbling or trampolining or wrestling, while others go for walks or trips around the city. Others climb trees, swing, play in the sandbox in the back yard, or go to the playground in the park. Once every month or so, the whole school will go on an outing together - say, into the country to pick apples in an orchard or to a picnic in the park, or tobogganing in the snow. Or sometimes the big kids will go to a nearby farm for a few days, a farm where we have a standing invitation to use a converted barn to sleep in, animals to be taken care of, wilderness to tramp in and wild life to learn about.

If we had the luxury of an entire childhood within which to operate, as Neill did, we might not set up priorities for

academic skills so stringently, but of this, I am not so sure. Neill established voluntarism as his first principle, in my opinion. In Summerhill, one never forced a child to do anything he doesn't want to do. Well, that sounds fine. And neither do we! But when you try to translate such a principle into actual community mores and rules of conduct, what you end up doing is firing the hold-outs who won't give in voluntarily, the incorrigibles. If we tried to do that, we'd have no school to speak of. Oh, we've sent kids home for a few days to think things over, and once, we even sent a girl to another school for three months to find out what the "real world" was all about, so she could choose where she wanted to be. But we have never just told a kid, "Get out and don't ever come back!" Rather than put that onus onto a kid, we would prefer to intervene in the child's life to set limits to his behavior. And we don't equate that setting of limits with enforcement of adult management of the child's choices. Perhaps that's what Neill meant by "freedom, not license."

There is a middle-class "open school" in Albany that patterns itself on Summerhill in following an inviolable rule of never tolerating active intervention of any sort in the lives of the children. They see such intervention as "violating their space," and they view us as virtually antichrist where children are concerned because we do not adhere to any such ideological stand. And I do believe it is an ideological stand. We do not "advocate" intervention any more than we condemn it, because we do not function ideologically but try to find out what the

Photo by Dave Brickman, Albany Times-Union photographer

Crafts Room
Desi, Rosalie, Eve, Gaby

Photo by Mickie McCormic

Peppy

real needs are in every case and respond to those needs in whatever way seems most appropriate.

We have gotten three or four kids from this "open" school who in our opinion were behaving in deeply disturbed and disturbing ways, being either self-destructive or destructive of the rights of others. We have had no hesitation in intervening in such behavior. It is our belief that adults need to play a very active role in the lives of children and that children get most of their values from the adults they are with. Too many adults are afraid of playing an adult role, and too often the result is that the kids believe the adults simply don't give a damn what they, the kids, do!

We do maintain an attitude of non-intervention between kids or between a kid and an adult, however, when interaction, not "acting-out," is taking place. The rest of us take it for granted that, when two persons are at odds, this interaction is meaningful to the two involved, and we try not to take sides. We in no way discourage two people who have a problem from having it out on whatever terms they choose, even if those terms sometimes become physical, and even if one is an adult and the other a child. Naturally, we do not condone adult violence against a child, any more than we do between children when some sort of unfair advantage is involved or if one is an older or stronger child. It is, amazingly, rarely necessary for us to intervene between two children because one of them is in such a berserk rage as to endanger the safety or life of the other child.

We find that, in the long run, children learn to work out non-violent solutions to their sense of injury at the hands of another child, far more rapidly and fully when not stopped from having a go at him in the beginning. It is as though they can give up actual physical combat when they know they *can* resort to it in a pinch! I often wonder if the violence of our society is not largely a compensation for a feeling of inner helplessness from never having discovered how fully capable one is of a good self-defense. Even the most helpless, mamma-oriented child will turn at long last and defend him or herself when he finally realizes no adult is going to come to his rescue. Our kids' general self-confidence level, their spontaneity, their ability to throw themselves fearlessly into all activities, from tumbling to throwing a pot on our kick wheel, from wrestling to reading, is in proportion to their ability to defend themselves, verbally, emotionally, or physically.

Since so many of our families come from such overwhelmingly difficult circumstances, we have had to learn how to move the children as quickly as we can into a positive environment. We do not, for example, wait for spontaneous discovery in the reading program to set in. We have learned to surround kids with an extremely rich environment offering many choices of expressive media and stimuli for establishing contact as quickly and pleasurably as possible. Our low pupil-teacher ratio (four to one) permits a great deal of individual work with the children. On the other hand, if a child clearly chooses not to learn to read - or any other school subject, this is not an issue for us. We respect the child's choice, and make

an effort to "go to bat" for him at home. Pressure to do good school work comes from home, not from us, and we struggle to keep the child's space open.

Funding

My inheritance of a relatively modest sum of money ($50,000) blessed our school at the outset with a viable economic base. First, we bought an old parochial school in the Italian ghetto for $18,000 and then, for a total of $10,000, two other city houses to serve as housing for the teachers and production of income. Since that time, for an additional $12,000, we have acquired three more city houses and a garage plus two lots of land adjoining the school property. I include these details regarding our financing to spell out for skeptics how much can be done in institutional terms with a comparatively puny sum of money, provided the model for the institution is "organic" rather than externally imposed. By "organic," I mean growing from within in response to real needs rather than from pre-conceived ideas generated outside the actual situation.

After we had acquired our school building, we realized that the total budget on which we were operating, which was based on a charge of tuition from only those families who could afford it, barely covered the basic necessities of overhead and upkeep. Our first efforts, therefore, went toward raising additional funds. Teachers, children, and parents all worked very hard putting on garage sales, candy sales, benefit concerts, and so on. We also wrote grant proposals to a long list of

agencies, both private and public, that fund schools like ours. But, increasingly, it became clear that if we were to survive, we would have to generate most of our own income and that these mighty efforts, which were consuming a great deal of our time and energy, would end by killing the very enterprise they were designed to benefit by taking the vitality away from our work with the children.

We also soon realized that, if we were to survive, we could not "hire" teachers in the way other schools did. After a year of struggling to do things as they were commonly done, we realized we were dying from an outlay none of us who worked in the school either wanted or had really asked for. As an employer, we had to pay the government lots of money in the form of withholding taxes, social security deposits and workmen's compensation. Not only that, but our real estate taxes for the property were strangling us, too. So our first retrenchment from the usual way of doing things was to stop: stop trying to raise money, stop paying salaries.

We then incorporated as a tax-exempt corporation, since we were an educational city resource. This process took two years but brought us, as a side effect, an on-going relationship with various members of the city government, including the mayor, a sense of presence in the community we might not have developed had we not had to struggle to achieve our goal of financial survival. A lot of schools like ours exist in both a social and political vacuum, and I believe their children suffer a similar lack of relatedness as a result. Ours know their place in the local scene, and take pride in the school's reputation. To

my way of thinking, such an experience is worth a hundred courses in "civics."

We then began looking for an internally generated source of income which would make us relatively autonomous. We looked for funds with which to capitalize our corporate property holdings and raised a pretty good sum from a few interested people, which we then used to purchase houses near the school, most of them at county tax-delinquency auctions. During these five years, as our staff grew, we gradually rehabilitated one house after another and rented out apartments which now bring in half of our annual income.

The acquisition of buildings has been a gradual growth. The first houses we got were in good condition, but, later, as our staff increased and we needed more houses, we had to buy some in very poor condition, and our combined skills as renovators became important. At the present time [1976], we rent out eleven apartments in addition to the four we reserve for teachers, of whom we have eleven full-time. The rented apartments bring us a net income of approximately $500 per month, which we supplement with our meager tuition and contributions income of roughly the same amount. On this budget, we survive quite nicely, paying a few teachers pocket money from time to time, but mostly depending on them to generate their own as needed.

Like Mr. Micawber, we live in a state of complete happiness which stays perilously close to equally complete misery! But it works. We keep our bank balance above the red

line and our energy flowing into the life of the school and the community which supports it.

Health—Exercise, Nutrition, and Prophylaxis

We have learned to take very seriously the issue of physical health and the prevention of disease. When your goal is to help children learn, they must be in a position to be present in school, both in body and soul, before that learning can take place. And increasingly, our experience has been that the problems which keep coming up and which prevent children from being open to the learning process are danger signals. Warning! Something is wrong! Do something! We try to remain sensitive to such signals and to do something about them.

A great many of the problems our families encounter have to do with poor health, poor nutrition, poor immunity to disease. We conduct a very thorough program of medical supervision and treatment on an on-going basis for all the children in the school, using a remarkably fine community health center that has a team system of delivery of health services, providing excellent continuity of care. We also give the children an excellent hot meal at noon, plus a mid-morning snack of fruit or crackers and cheese, which we are able to do thanks to the federal free lunch program. Further, we totally ban the eating of candy in the school and urge families not to give it to their children.

We also have daily exercises for fifteen minutes every morning, not so much for muscle toning as to help people wake up and come alive. Thus, we do mostly loosening-up and

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livening-up exercises, rather than straining ones. One very important thing we do is the eye and facial expressiveness exercises. It is amazing to me to see how many kids have eye blocks of one degree or another. When they do the "lion," for example, in which you protrude your eyes, stick out your tongue, and make a loud noise, many children cover their eyes at first in fear, as though they feel unprotected. But whatever we do, we are very careful to keep our awareness on the significance of the experience and not allow any of the exercises to be used mechanically by either teachers or children. This requires real contact on the part of all who work with the children.

Over the years, the staff members saw with increasing clarity the importance of maintaining contact with the children and one another. This I took on more and more as my primary function—to provide a kind of supportive back-up for people wanting to make the school a way of life, either temporarily, as in the case of students from Antioch and other colleges, or on a long-term basis.

Staff and Community

The most crucial ingredient in our continuing success has been the people who have chosen to invest themselves in our enterprise without thought of benefit to themselves in the world's terms, but only of the ultimate satisfaction of the work itself and the daily experience of being part of the adventure. Initially, there were just myself and Bruce Loveys. Bruce had his master's in history and had taught in a consolidated high

school for three years, and he was searching, as I was, for something that made more sense. Then, gradually, one after another came, saw, and stayed for the sheer love of the experience and the experience of love.

Bruce and I have long believed that a closed society is self-defeating in the long run. I realize that some schools, such as Summerhill and the Fifteenth Street School and Lewis-Wadhams, have had to operate as closed societies in order to maintain their integrity in the face of intruders. With this point of view, I have a good deal of sympathy, but I also believe that any school that systematically excludes any group of people is in danger of becoming stultified and tradition-bound in the course of time. In our case, this has never become a problem since there are so few people to whom our format and salary scale (zero!) appeal. For this reason, we very early adopted the attitude that we would accept any and all comers who wanted to work with us, both teachers and families.

We now have eleven staff members, plus part-time students on leave from the university. Our qualifications are impressive, including one Ph.D., two M.A.s, three teaching certificates, one B.A., one associate degree, two college students for whom the school is a part of their study course, and one woman from the neighborhood. Two of the staff are black, of whom one is also Puerto Rican. Five are men. Four teachers are also parents of children in the school.

Generally, no one is delegated in any formal way as the one who plays this role or that—say, the one who keeps track of dental appointments—as we tend to take on habitual roles as a

personal choice. Some roles we do parcel out formally, however, such as the classroom teacher roles, and those of crafts teacher, cook, woodshop teacher, swimming supervisor, and movie projector operator, but all or any of these roles are either spoken for or are rotated so everyone takes his turn.

The teachers have weekly night meetings at which we work very hard at increasing and maintaining contact with all the dimensions of our roles and with one another. Then, for both staff and parents, we have an optional weekly four-hour group meeting devoted to encouraging the men and women to function in ever more loving and emotionally honest ways with one another. We encourage our teachers to seek monogamous sexual relationships as the best possible way of living sanely and humanly.

I have found that if one stays well within this primary criterion of contact, people seem to have an instinctive sense of what they can and cannot tolerate in terms of increasing that contact. Those who cannot tolerate the rise in anxiety voluntarily drop out, giving one excuse or another, and we let them go. I believe this way of doing things serves very well to effect a self-selecting staff.

Most of our staff are middle-class in origin, but I believe the terrible gap that ordinarily exists between teachers and students, especially in ghetto schools, is far less devastating in our community than in most. I suppose this is true mainly because we feel that the lower class culture, as opposed to the *pathology* to which poor people incline, and in contrast with the *pathology* of middle-class people, is healthier for children than

the culture of affluence. We see more real love, concern, and matter-of-factness in regard to children among poor parents—in other words, more contact with life—than among middle class people. It may be that living in a society that allows people to define "the enemy" as out there, as tangible, allows families to turn their nutritive energies more inward among one another and their destructive energies outward toward the cold, cruel world.

The pathology of poor people—the intense, ever-ready hostility and suspiciousness, the physical violence, the lack of willingness to postpone gratification, the deep self-hatred beneath the surface arrogance which protects from hurt—creates an unstable base for continuity of relationships. Yet somehow it gives us a chance to hold out our love and support in tangible ways that can be recognized by families, so there is created step by step a real sense of belonging one to another, which by far transcends the superficial sort of surface contact that is ordinarily the only kind that is possible among prosperous urban and suburban families. It is this hunger for real intimacy, real contact, which each of us learns to satisfy with one another, that creates a sense of real community.

When we began looking toward the community as a source of income, we also became members of the community in a real way and our attitude toward our role as a school came to include the community around us. We began playing a role in arbitrating disagreements between neighbors who either lived in our apartments or next door to them. As problems with children arose, it became necessary to work out ways of

including parents and neighbors in finding solutions to those problems.

The general attitudes of our neighbors toward us are intangible and difficult to assess in cause and effect terms, but I believe they are very real. We have worked hard to see to it that our children and our teachers treat our community with great respect. I do not believe it is simply my own wishful feeling that I seem to sense less tension, more friendship and relaxed enjoyment of each others' company among our neighbors than was evident when we first moved into the community. More and more families whose children attend our school are finding ways to move close to our neighborhood so their children can enjoy the pleasure of a large circle of friends of all ages. Increasingly, we are becoming a real village. More parents attend our monthly parents' meetings, at which we discuss very little of a formal nature, reserving that for twice-yearly conferences, but instead, simply enjoying getting to know each other, watch slides of the children, sip coffee, and generally socialize. In the beginning, it was the middle-class parents who came, and the lower-class ones who tended to stay away. Presently, it is more likely to be the other way around, although some middle-class parents do come regularly.

We have learned, too, to make good use of various social agencies that are available to us for solving problems, such as the federally funded community health center I mentioned above which offers such an extraordinarily high quality of health care of all kinds, as well as a number of state, county, and municipal agencies that offer supportive services to poor

families, including child protective services, social services, and counseling services. And, once in a while, we even use such enforcement agencies as the police and the school and family courts. Such social agencies, we have found, at least in our city, operate with surprising humanity and personal involvement, and we have never regretted allowing any of them to play a role in helping us to help families turn themselves around from their habit of viewing themselves as helpless victims of society rather than as full members of it.

Conclusion

We are beginning to have a feeling of security, for each of the seven years has been less anxious, our staff has grown steadily larger, we have kept out of debt, everyone has been fed and housed not only satisfactorily but well, and we have developed a strong sense of commonality which has been a great source of strength to us all. In large part, I attribute the success of this daring venture to the sense of stability and good management brought to the enterprise by Bruce Loveys who, aside from his regular teaching has served as treasurer, bookkeeper, landlord, superintendent of buildings, and foreman of the maintenance crew, as well as taking a stint at bus-driving, cooking, and all the other chores we share around.

I feel that our school community fills a gap that exists for many people that is unfilled by any social agency or in ever-increasing degree by the family itself, and that this kind of role is an increasingly desperate and urgent need in our society. Our actual numbers are infinitesimal in proportion to the size of

the need, but I sometimes hope that we may have something to contribute to a better understanding of how schools could help families to pull themselves up out of the morass of poverty to join the mainstream of society. But whether or not this is the case, we who live together in our school live our lives with a great deal of joy and excitement. This experience is an end in itself.

COMMENT

This article, which has been published a couple of times - once in my journal **ΣΚΟΛΕ** *and again in the collection of articles I called* Challenging the Giant - the best of **ΣΚΟΛΕ**, the journal of alternative education - *was written over a period of thirteen years, starting in 1971 and completed in 1983. My incentive for completing it was a request by Pat Montgomery, president of the National Coalition of Alternative Community Schools, of which I was very briefly a board member, for an account of our school's history to be sent to some educationists in Japan who were interested in the concept of educational alternatives as developed in this country. Additionally, it has been revised and updated somewhat since that time , but in the main represents the school as it was in 1983.*

I expect it might be well for me to try to express what I believe about schooling. First, I believe that school is a mirror of society, and that whenever you attempt to establish a school, you must take into account, in some way, the issue of an unchanging society as well. This fact creates all sorts of tensions between parents and school which profoundly influence the way the school operates. John Holt has been so pessimistic about the possibility of finding a solution to this problem as to advocate, support and assist parents who want to school their children at home. More and more of the "alternative school people" are turning to this option.

But from the perspective of the plight of thousands of children who have no other options than the public schools, homeschooling must perhaps be viewed as a cop-out,as divisive in its overall effect as the "rural free schools" alternative Jonathan Kozol criticized so poignantly in his book Free Schools. *No, not because there is anything "wrong" with homeschooling! I began that way myself, and would do it again if my children were hurting badly enough in public school! But we "alternative school" people reserve the right to hold ourselves as having found a superior solution to the problem of schooling the young in being non-coercive, and in some sense hold other critics of public schools of the variety which call themselves "holistic" to be irrelevant to the educational issue, in the sense of the saying, "If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem!" Well, it ain't that simple, I believe! Why do we bother to vote at all if we find it so easy to turn our backs on the most miserable, the most victimized segment of our people and their children?*

How much credence are we willing to give to the belief that any school which perpetuates the existing class system is essentially irrelevant to the proper concerns of society for the welfare of all *its children? This is a paradox which suggests the necessity for "politicizing" the school, and is the opposite of the Froebelian "garden of children" view. But then, John Taylor Gatto reminds me that Froebel was a part of the Prussian state and had no concern whatsoever for democratic education!*

I think advocacy of any one model for educational reform presents a potential built-in danger of ideologizing children's experience, which is nonsensical, as Neill would have immediately

pointed out! Yet ignoring the issue can be even worse, from the point of view of education for democracy, it seems to me.

The issue of ideology is, I think, the crucial one. If you confuse means and ends, you get into all sorts of mistakes. You really have to have a clear goal, but what you do in a school has to do with activity which is an end in itself, not just a means to anything. I have attempted to develop this theme further in the last article in the volume, so I shan't say any more here.

In 1969, my husband and I, accompanied by our two youngest kids, returned from a year in England, where the two kids had been enrolled in a village school. It had been a good year for them, especially for Mark, and the return to a typical Albany fifth grade in the public school he had been attending before we left was a real shock. Thirty-five kids were cooped up in a classroom designed for twenty, with a teacher so frazzled and overworked that she actually had to be hospitalized on the psychiatric ward of our local hospital shortly after I let Mark persuade me that he really couldn't stand the prison-like atmosphere any longer. Any hesitation I may have had as to the wisdom of this decision vanished when I heard of her breakdown. Mark had good instincts, as do most kids!

The first thing I had to do was to establish the legality of keeping Mark at home, and the principal of his school left me no doubt on this issue, calling me to warn me of legal action against me the very day the school nurse ascertained from me that Mark was indeed not sick but had withdrawn from school. Being in the state capital, I decided to make some phone calls to

find out for myself if this was actually the case, since I was a teacher. I was fortunate indeed to find a man in the curriculum department of the state department of education who assured me that my action was legal, and who offered to give "state guidelines" to anyone from the local school board who hassled me. This, again, was fortunate, because the very next day I received a call from the head of the bureau of "attendance and guidance," (the truant officer), who began an impassioned harangue warning me of the terrible things that were about to occur to me should I refuse to bring Mark back at once, but calmed right down when I gave him the name of the man from "State Ed." Shortly after this, he called back and apologized for his previous manner, assuring me that what I was doing was fine, and that he would be happy to give me any help he could if I should run into any problems. And, actually, during the twenty-one years of our existence, this has been the case. He has been our liaison with the superintendent of schools, has given us a lot of help in various times of trouble including a brush two years ago with the county health department, and has been not only respectful of our operation but really sympathetic with our purpose, since his chief clientèle comes from the same "population" ours does, and he knows the problems that can arise.

About two weeks after Mark and I got started on our tutorial venture, I ran into a friend with six children in another of Albany's "finest" public schools, and when she heard what I had done, begged me to take on her three youngest, who she said were acting as though their lives were on the line every

morning when going-to-school time came around, and whom she usually ended up having to accompany there. One of my chief worries had been that Mark would feel isolated from his friends, and this sounded great, so I agreed at once, and we were in the school business!

The year we spent at my home went swimmingly. We all loved the experience, and since it was the year of the student strikes and the Cambodia crisis, as well as the initiation of "Earth Day," it was a very exciting time to be "free" of school - and for me, to be actually conducting my own little "unschool," planning and carrying out my own design of curriculum, which included a lot of projects like picking up twelve trash bags of cans, bottles and other garbage thrown down an embankment by the side of a public road near the house (on Earth Day), helping at a day care center set up for the children of university strikers and others, putting on home-written plays, learning to develop film, making our own movies, cooking and baking, and generally enjoying ourselves a great deal while learning the three R's.

Toward the end of the year, we took a vote and decided to go on with the school the following year, even though the other three were moving during the summer, and so, we would be back to a population of one. I decided to ask for advice at this point, and went to see a friend of mine whom I trusted as having an enlightened view of children's education, she being the religious education director of the local Unitarian Church where I had taught Sunday School for a number of years. Her advice was to have a talk with an educational filmmaker in Newton,

Massachusetts who was running a resource center for early childhood education and whose films dealt with the development of successful alternative education programs in various places, notably the experiments in Philadelphia associated with the Parkway Program, but on an elementary level.

I took a week off from school, and went on my travels. Alan Leitman, the filmmaker, received me warmly, and gave me several suggestions. One was that I first ask a local newspaper to do a feature on our little school, and then that I rent a few films depicting the kind of school I was interested in creating and show them in community places, in order to attract the kinds of families who would want our kind of school for their kids. He also suggested that I visit a few "free schools" in the New York state and New England regions, to see how they actually look in action. He warned me to start small, learn my "trade" at every stage of the process before moving to a larger operation, and in general, to ensure that the enterprise was sound at every step of the way; that we really knew our business and were accomplishing what we set out to do, not just playing kid games. That advice still governs everything we do.

So, I began that very day, visiting Jonathan Kozol's Roxbury Community School on the way home, and three others over the following few days, one in Buffalo, one in Syracuse, and a third in New York City. A week later an article appeared in the newspaper which included large pictures of the five of us gathered (untypically) around our round dining room table surrounded by books and papers. It also mentioned that I would

be showing three films on "free school" education at the Unitarian Church and at the university, which I did the following week to crowded rooms of fascinated adults whose appetite for information about this new "thing" seemed boundless. Out of these three exposures to the public, I found a group of four families interested in sending us their children and in working as a group to help us find a suitable building and at least one other teacher for the seven kids who would be involved.

Suddenly, providentially and wholly unexpectedly, a friend of my older offspring named George gave me a call and asked if he could drop over to chat. Puzzled, I agreed, and lo, what he wanted to talk about was his wish to quit high school teaching (where his best friend had been recently fired for refusing to shave off his beard) and come to teach with me at our fledgling school, now christened "The Free School" by my four students. I agreed enthusiastically, and introduced him to our little group of parents at the next strategy meeting. They were equally delighted.

By this time, June was over and our school was out for the summer. One other mother and I set out in earnest to find a building where we could hold forth, and right away, the first snags began to appear. There were no buildings to be had that we could afford which would give us what I knew to be an absolute necessity as a school site - one large room for gatherings, roughhouse, and general togetherness, plus enough additional space for activity rooms, eating, a lab, at least one good bathroom, an office, a good-sized kitchen, and play space

outside. We literally searched for weeks, surveying the entire region, even including the top floor of a factory building which would have been ideal as a huge area on which we could erect our own partitions at will, the owners of which had been playing with offering it to the city for a municipally-funded day care center. At the last minute, they said no, after learning that we would be privately funded at a rate far below what they had been hoping to get from the city! Like Tom Lehrer's "old dope peddler," they had wanted to "do well by doing good."

We began desperately asking churches for space in their Sunday School quarters, were refused by at least three church boards and suddenly, were offered the rental of an entire church building for $100 a month by a black minister whose congregation had bought a fine stone church across town and were moving out. This was a frame building in a state of great neglect but essential soundness, and we grabbed for it frantically and with great relief, because, by this time it was nearing the end of the summer and we had not yet even begun to prepare the space for the school. After a hasty consultation with our parent group, and with the reality of our financial straits before our faces, we all agreed on this building, which was in the inner city. The price was right, the size was ideal, and our appetite for renovation was boundless, none of us having done any!

Immediately, we all set out to put it into usable shape. Working virtually around the clock, sharing coffee and sandwiches far into the night, we worked to cover up the grime with new paint, even going so far as to paint floor-to-ceiling

blackboards in several rooms, scrubbing whatever we could not paint, attaching as a fire escape an iron staircase we found at a wrecking company to an upstairs door which had opened onto thin air, for a reason none of us ever fathomed. By the time school started, we had already grown to love this place, funky as it was, but indisputably ours!

One event which had charmed and excited me, but which proved a harbinger of trouble to come, was the fact that, no sooner had we opened our doors (to let in fresh air as well as to bring in ladders and so on) than hordes of curious black children began coming inside, asking us a zillion questions and begging to be allowed to stay and color or play school. These ranged from the ages of three and four up to twelve at least. This happening gave me dreams of attracting a whole schoolful of neighborhood kids as students, and my response to the universal question, when they learned that we were a school ("A *school* ? You a school? Yo' kids goin' play here? Can I come?") was, "Go ask your momma, and if she says you can, you tell her to come and talk with us and then you can come here, OK?" The older ones would ask, "Do it cost money?" and my instinct was always to say, "No, it's free." My hunger for the children was always greater than my financial sense, and I guess I haven't yet changed that. Fortunately for me, Bruce, the other teacher, felt the same way about the children as I did, so at least at this point, there was no trouble. But it was coming.

Oddly enough, it came from the direction of the only black mother among our parent group, a well-educated and cultured woman whose husband was a university professor, but

who had evidently grown up in Harlem among lower class black people. Her eight-year-old son was obviously quite timorous in the presence of so many street-wise ghetto children, especially of two brothers, one ten, the other twelve, whose father had been living alone in a tiny apartment on the first floor of the church as caretaker, and whose presence struck us as a good idea, especially since he was on SSI payments for a bad back, and so, required no pay for continuing to keep an eye on the building in a neighborhood swarming with bold and curious kids who had nothing in their lives to catch their passion except illegal but highly exciting street activities of one sort or another. Also, he was the father of these particular brothers, whom we had spotted as potential troublemakers or students, depending on how we played our cards.

One day while Helen, the black faculty wife, was painting walls and her son Lanny was playing with Jerry and James, the brothers, and I was scrubbing the bathroom floor off the kitchen, I heard yelling and then an awful sound of thumping, over and over! I ran out, and was just in time to see Jerry and James pick themselves up at the bottom of our very long, steep staircase. Helen was standing at the top of the stairs, yelling down at them to go home (they lived with their mother on a nearby street.) Both boys stood for a while at the bottom of the stairs stunned, then broke into a run and disappeared. When I inquired from Helen what had happened, she told me James had been holding Lanny's arms pinned at his sides while Jerry began to run at him with his head lowered in butting position. She had intervened at this point and had taken both boys by

the arm, dragged them to the stairs and bodily thrown them down! I was appalled, but she was so visibly shaken herself that I knew that this was not the time to try to reason with her.

But when a crowd of angry black men, women, and children of various sizes appeared in the street in front of the building, some of them armed with iron pipes and bricks, I told Helen quietly, "I would like you to go down and talk with these people. I'll come with you, but this has to be set straight, and you will have to do it if you can." The scene that followed would have been the ultimate irony if it had not been so poignantly tragic. Picture Helen, in her silver linen skirt and hand-woven blouse,finely crafted silver earrings dangling from her ears, hand-made sandals on her feet, crying out passionately to this group of black people whose whole appearance bespoke their proximity in time and history to the post-reconstruction agricultural south of the share-cropper newly come north to seek refuge from hunger and despair, "I know you people! I am one of you! I grew up with people just like you, and you are all killers!" To me, it was a wonder they didn't lynch her on the spot. But gradually, by degrees, George and I managed to quiet the mob spirit by apologizing for the incident and assuring the tribe (for it turned out that every one of them were the boys' relatives - aunts, uncles, cousins, and so on) that it would not happen again, and that we regretted it very much. It was a foretaste of what was to come out of our naive and explosive effort to conduct a free school in the midst of a totally neglected and furiously angry welfare proletariat (I

cannot think of any other term which so aptly fits the characteristics of this group)

The school year got underway in early September, and felt very exciting. George and I found we could work together very well indeed, and our parents seemed happy with the new experiment. We met weekly to discuss funding and other considerations, and seemed to get on very well together. One day late in the month a charming young woman appeared at our door and asked if she could teach with us, having just graduated from an Ohio school of education. Of course, we agreed enthusiastically, and the children all fell in love with her. Our only problem was finding enough money to pay salaries, rent, phone and utilities. We all came up with all sorts of strategies for raising this money, and participated enthusiastically in doing so. We had bake sales, rummage sales, garage sales, and candy sales. None of them raised much money, but they were a lot of fun. Soon three other families joined us, and we really felt we had a nice little school going. Jerry, younger of the black boys whom Helen had been pushed downstairs, asked to become a member of the school, and we all agreed amicably, even Helen and her husband. Things seemed to be going amazingly well.

Then two things happened, sometime in December, or early January. Two new children enrolled in the school, and two new families brought us their children, a significant distinction, as it turned out.. The mix proved to be dynamite. First, the children. One snowy day a bedraggled little troupe of four children resembling nothing so much as Wendy and the

lost boys from Peter Pan arrived on our doorstep from out of the soft white opaqueness that covered the city's ugliness.. "What is this place?" asks one. "A school," we answer. "Can we visit?" "Sure, if you behave yourselves." So in they come: Ginny, a skinny girl of fifteen (as we subsequently learned) who could pass for twelve, Bobby and Henry, her brothers, ten and eleven, one light-skinned, the other white; and Alfred, their white cousin, a kid of twelve or thirteen the size of an average nine-year-old. They were delighted with us all, and immediately asked if they could join the school. Standard response, "Go home and ask your mother. If it's O.K. with her, it's O.K. with us."

Well, Alfred was sure his mother would approve, and dashed off to ask her. Ginny, who seemed to be the spokesperson for all three members of her family, informed us that her mother was dead and that her father probably would not agree, but said she would ask anyway. Half an hour later, Alfred appeared virtually dragging his mother, who reluctantly gave her approval of his admission, saying, "Well, I was just about ready to send him to Rome anyway (a state institution for retarded children which subsequently became notorious for its flagrant abuse and neglect of its inmates.). I can't do nothin' with him, and that school has him in one of those special classes. He ain't learnin' nothin'. If he wants to come here, it'll be the first time he ever wanted to be in a school, so I guess he can come here." Alfred was so overjoyed at this that he whooped and sprang upon me, wrapping both skinny arms and legs around my body and squeezing tightly, as if to insure a

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permanent bond that would never again come loose! And actually, it never has! In the years that followed, we kept Alfred as long as we could, protected him as much as possible (once even rescuing him from the police station where he had been collared and brought in by a policeman who had caught him robbing a mailbox!) from the family tradition set for him by his brothers (his brother Joey had been in jail for idiotic robberies on at least two occasions!). He never did learn to read, even after leaving us and enrolling *twice* in adult education programs. What Albert lacked in common sense, alas, he more than made up for in speed! That kid was so hyper, he *couldn't* slow down enough to take life one step at a time. But the spirit in that undersized body was absolutely pure and sweet! He once told me, shaking his head solemnly, "Mary, you should see my room. I have shelves all around my bed and I keep buying books to put on them. I *love* books!" He's married now and has three kids, and has finally learned to read, after at least five separate tries!

Ginny came back soon after, with a different story. "My father says I can come, because he don't care about me, but the boys gotta go to public school and learn somethin'." She had already taken them back to their school, where she had been supposed to bring them in the first place. How their father *knew* the boys wouldn't learn anything in our school seems a bit mysterious to me, but he probably believed that if you hated school, that was a sure sign it was a good one, and if you didn't learn there, then that just showed your cussedness, or your stupidity. In other words, within his lights, he was being a

conscientious father! The fact that Henry and Bobby would play truant every time they dared and would come to us (which meant one of us, usually me, trudging with them all the way back to their school, knocking on the classroom door - they were in the same "special ed" class - having the sour-faced guard - oops, I mean, teacher - unlock it and greet them with exasperation, shooting a resentful look at me, as though I were responsible for their evil conduct) meant nothing to him, except to confirm his belief in their criminality. And Bobby has in fact spent most of his young adult life in prison for various crimes. Henry, Ginny informed me, "had a rubber hose up his ass and would die if he got kicked," which I suppose means he had had his colon or rectum resected for ulcerative colitis.

At any rate, this seems to have kept him docile and law-abiding, even though he too has never learned to read, let alone find a job. He lives with Ginny and has indeed become a "lost boy." It has been sad, though, watching Bobby change from an angelic-looking boy with light brown skin and curls and a wistful look in his eye to a sullen, hate-filled criminal who eyes you cynically, when he bothers to acknowledge you at all. Bobby's trouble is that he's not dumb enough to accept his fate! His native wit rebels. It is appalling to me to see his sad, intelligent spirit imprisoned in that ugly body and mind. No, Ginny never learned to read, either, but she did find out who her friends were. She has six children, now, at the age of thirty-two, and for several years, would bring them to us, one by one, as they reached the age of three. Repeated pregnancy and child-rearing have taken their toll of her appetite for

motherhood, alas, and she finally took her four away from us when the oldest two, who adore their father, began wetting their beds and in other ways behaving badly at home after he left finally and for good, and we took his side in wanting regular visitation rights - but at least the three oldest are still "ours," and will be all right, we hope and believe. Ginny does have an instinct for finding good men to father her children, and the present one, who is father to the two youngest, really seems to care for the entire brood, even though his hand is sometimes too heavy. We stay in touch.

But this is still in the future, and my narrative is of the past. The new families proved a problem far greater than the new children. One father was an assistant professor of psychology from the university newly married to a young widow with three children, the oldest of which was our student, and determined to assert his parental authority with this boy in particular. He had considerable skepticism about the nature of our school to begin with, and as his PhD thesis was on the subject of non-violence, was prone to see violence everywhere. His interventions, or efforts to intervene, in our school policy of encouraging children to work out their own solutions to interpersonal problems via a council meeting system of self-governance as well as by other problem-solving devices which did not prevent violence as such but taught them how to handle problems which left unsolved would have led to violence, struck us as authoritarian in impact, as our policies struck him, evidently, as anarchy.

Parent meetings began to acquire the characteristics of a battleground, with factions lining up pro and con school personnel and policies, but mostly con. It was an uncomfortable time, and its effect on the school was to cause those of us who were actually at school from day to day to decide to adopt a policy of permitting only those who were actually involved in being there to make rules as to how we could or should do things. Any parent who chose to be there would automatically be a part of that decision-making process, but other parents could only advise, but not demand or direct. It was our first real move toward absolute internal autonomy, and is still in effect. I still believe it is the only possible way we could have managed things in such a way as to make them work, but the cost in loss of families was great at the time. All but four of them withdrew their kids at the end of the school year.

But this division was only the beginning of our troubles! The other new family was a divorced wife and her son Teddy. Suzanne was living with a black militant, a *big* no-no at the time, and even now, I believe, grounds for loss of custody of a woman's child with most family court judges. We got caught in the midst of the custody battle for control of where Teddy would live and go to school. His father, a professor of obstetrics at the local medical school, had as his lawyer a former city court judge who elected to focus on our school as the second grounds for custody, the first, of course, being his client's ex-wife's sexual preferences. The first thing we knew about this was when we were visited, in rapid succession, by an attorney from the

office of corporation counsel for the city, the chief of the fire department, an official from the building department, and a man from the county health department. One after another, these officials told us that we would be summarily shut down, some unless we complied with their requirements, others, just shut down, period. I must admit, we were pretty alarmed, called an emergency meeting of parents, and began frantically trying to find out what, if anything, we could do to meet the situation.

Then the children got into the act. I guess that was my fault. I became alarmed by the threat and told the kids what was going on, and they decided to set up a picket line outside the school protesting the unfairness of the city. Then I called in the media. The signs made by the kids were most eloquent, and the photographers had a "human interest" field day. Reporters and picture-takers from both newspapers and all three TV channels swarmed, and we were a short term sensation for the silly season. At the mayor's press conference every week, the reporter from Channel Six would ask him, "Well, have you closed The Free School down yet?" And he would answer, "I'm looking into it." The building department assigned us a permanent "advisor." It seems even our fire escape was illegal, lacking a platform at the top.

But... we weren't closed down. We made some changes, did some housekeeping, and let a lot of people know that we took their comments seriously. And gradually, the heat subsided. I made an appointment to talk with the mayor. He was *very* understanding, but made it *very* clear how much he deplored my having used the weapon of publicity. I was *very*

apologetic and contrite. It was a real father-daughter scene. I think he was quite relieved to have us off his back.

So ended our first exciting year of the "official" school. Toward the end of the school year we had finally received our tax-exempt status from Internal Revenue, and since this had been reputed to me as an extremely difficult feat to accomplish - and I had done it without legal representation or even setting up a corporation - I felt elated. Our funding problem was still an acute one, and I believed that having tax-exempt status would encourage people to donate money to us. The same mother who had helped me to find our building, Carol, and I now took on the task of seeking out a grant or grants to help us solve this problem. She and her husband together wrote out a series of eloquent grant proposals and sent them to several corporations reputed to have given money to other schools like ours. We got back a sheaf of polite and encouraging "no's".

It was very clear to all of us by now that our present building would not be suitable for occupancy the following year, and so, we set out to find a replacement. Quite early in the summer we located an ideal one, not far away, in the old Italian section of the south end, currently occupied by an Italian Catholic War Veterans' Post, and, historically, a former Italian language parochial school. The building department would be ecstatic, we knew, and so would we if we could get it at a price we could afford. My first attempt to raise this money, or enough of it for a mortgage, was to write a small grant proposal to three local millionaires who had expressed an interest in the families living in the inner city. I was inspired to do this on

reflecting that I had met two of them personally, and had heard from our woman teacher of the reputation for benevolence of the third, who was a friend of her father's and the owner of an electrical contracting firm which occasionally hired ghetto black adolescents. One of the other two I had met during a brief lecture series my philosophy professor husband had given at a nearby summer "Chautauqua" focused on the role of science in society. This man, a highly successful contractor who had put up many of the new downtown buildings in Albany and was well-known as a patron of the arts locally, had wined and dined us both at his sumptuous home in the posh new-money section of the city, and was reputed to be both enlightened and humane. The other, a lawyer from Troy (across the river from us) owned rental houses in the south end of Albany and was said to have a kindly interest in the "children of the ghetto," (presumably when he wasn't evicting tenants for protesting against his slumlord policies - although, to give him his due, he was by no means the worst of the absentee landlords, and was liked by most of his tenants!). Actually, he had come into our first school one day bringing us a box of Cherry Ames books, but had expressed disappointment at not seeing more black faces among the children. I believe we had only one really black face at that time - Jerry - although we had two light brown ones (one of them Lanny) and one white one that masked *black blood* (shudder)! But he was expecting shoe polish black, not interracial suntan. His "disappointment" was actually a twin of our own - or at least, of George's and mine. We had only begun to learn that poor black parents are the most exacting of all

groups in judging the potential usefulness of a school in money and status terms.

It makes perfect sense that this should be the case, when you think of it. These parents know full well from their own experience (mostly in the South) with inferior all-black schooling in dilapidated housing that such institutions do not attract the truly gifted teachers needed to educate their children. And at least, the public schools exhibit good, middle-class values and offer skills which can, theoretically, offer a way out of poverty and ignorance. In this view, if their children fail to learn, it shows either that the teachers are prejudiced and hence, are discriminating against their children (which is often the case!) or that their children themselves are responsible for their own failure, which leaves the family helpless to remedy the situation except by punishing their children, or by tutoring them, a solution not accessible to illiterate parents. Much the more comfortable belief of the two, as well as the most statistically prevalent one, is the race-class prejudice one, which, alas, often leads to the result of working to bring about the very thing it believes in, teachers and principals being human like the rest of us.

We were thus coming up against the catch-22 aspect of money and status in the society which defeats everyone who is at the bottom of the heap. The adage of capitalism that you have to *have* (money, success, status) to *get* (money, success, status) is true of schooling as well. This was a paradox we were to encounter time and again in the history of our school, and it is one which I believe has defeated most institutions in our

society which focus on working to resolve some of the class and race problems which plague our country. I vaguely remember reading an article in the *New Yorker* magazine, I think, by A.J. Liebling, which observed tellingly the accuracy with which people from different socio-economic levels sort themselves out when it comes to eating places. With very few exceptions, the people who eat at Neddick's (a lower-class restaurant chain) are from working class backgrounds, and would feel out of place, even if the prices were identical, at some more middle-class place like Schrafft's, according to Liebling, in spite of the fact that the food at the latter would be considerably tastier and more appetizing! This paradox does not reflect lack of discrimination concerning food, but rather, a keen instinct for social comfort, said the author. I think he was right! The parents who feel comfortable with us appear to feel instinctively that we must not know our business, and that for a school to instill middle-class values in a child, it must reflect those values, and hence, feel uncomfortable to those parents! Thus, the very parents who stand to benefit most from us are the ones with the strongest prejudice against us! Or so I gradually came to believe. I have sometimes had a fantasy of renaming the school "St. Anthony's Preparatory Academy" (the building was originally a parochial school named "St. Anthony's.").

I think that the year we had just experienced did at least two things for us. First, it taught us a lot about what our values of schooling were and how important to us. These values had been there underlying our ways of doing things, but this year

had, as it were, tested them in the fire of keen opposition and misfortune, and had helped us to consolidate what was real, in the sense that it had withstood the test of experience as opposed to being simply theoretical. Second, the year's events had brought home with unmistakable clarity the fact that you cannot be all things to all people, but must accept the fact that people differ widely in their beliefs concerning children's education - and consequently, it behooves you to be as open and as clear as possible in offering a school to people as an alternative for their children. Doing this conscientiously means that you lose some right away, but failing to do so entails the far greater agony of learning after spending a great deal of time and effort to do a conscientious and loving job with a child that it is not what the parents had in mind at all, and that you fail for this reason - namely, that you and they are unwittingly working at cross-purposes. I can say that we were able to understand this after a year of struggle with parents concerning who had the task of defining what was to happen, as well as what *was* happening! Actually, this process has proved to be the most important activity in which we engage in working with a family, and we are still occasionally surprised to discover a dimension of a family's value system we had not anticipated beforehand, with the unfortunate result that we lose the child.

Another interesting discovery we made along these lines has been the way in which the form of an institution follows the way in which it functions. One has a goal in mind, and one encounters obstacles in achieving that goal. The question is

always, if something in the form of the institution is working to help create this obstacle, how can we change that form to resolve the problem? This is fairly straightforward. But the next question is, what effect will this change have on the way the school operates internally, and will the change in some way change our goal by producing different results from the ones we had had in mind? And if so, what? My surmise is that a lot of schools start out being quite flexible and even experimental, and thus, exciting places for children to go to school, but end up becoming a caricature of themselves as a result of modifying their goals instead of retaining their original insight into how a school can be. They fit the children increasingly into the structure of the school instead of continuing to fit the structure to the child; and the excitement dies! When this happens, my belief is that it is the last thing parents and most teachers are likely to notice, but will attribute the change to the children themselves, and will act accordingly, in the time-honored way of blaming the victim.

Another "solution" to such a problem may be to adopt a belief that, after all, schooling (in a formal sense of the word) isn't very important (as Neill seems to have done at Summerhill). If a child is bright, he can always pick up skills elsewhere when he decides he wants them - and that to insist he learn them in this school would be tantamount to joining the other schools this one was set up to be an alternative to. My belief is that this is the false position a lot of middle class alternative schools have come to. John Holt also strikes me as having decided to indict all schools on some such grounds, by

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the force of his own logic. Its basis ignores the fact, among other things, that children of the minorities have no such options! I also wish he would do his homework in relation to the very important socializing function school serves, or should serve (by which I mean self-realization and maturation, not adaptation as such). John's notion that children can achieve genuine individuality in isolation from their peers seems to me naive when offered as a categorical alternative, and not just one which *may* be suitable for *some* families under special circumstances. John Dewey said it all a long time before John Holt was even born, and it seems impossible to me that he can have read Dewey's common-sensical sentiments about education, democracy and experience. If he has, and merely disagrees, then my conclusion must be that he personally lacks teaching experience in a real school, and ought to have some before he becomes an advocate to distraught parents. Destroying the problem is not the same thing as solving it. Our entire democratic system is based on education, and, bad in many ways though it may be, it is still better than no schooling! Discouragement with the present system hardly warrants the advocacy of its elimination. As Winston Churchill said of democracy itself, "It's the worst form of government there is - except for the others!" When one defines the problem incorrectly, the solution one proposes is going to be accordingly inaccurate and is likely simply to complicate the original problem. I think this was Jonathan Kozol's insight as he looked at the problems faced by our educational system over a number of years. His conclusion, to which I believe he still

holds, was that public education must be strengthened and preserved as our only hope for genuine participatory democracy (as opposed to the often mindless tribal loyalty and mythological credulity which currently and historically passes for democracy).

I guess you could even say we view our school as a potential source of inspiration to the public schools, perhaps somewhat as the monasteries saw themselves as preserving the learning and culture of the ancients during the era of the barbarian incursions which has been labeled the Dark Ages. If this image sounds a bit pretentious, it may be the result of our isolation from middle class society and our awareness of the virtually universal onus of racism and class prejudice which keeps us from having an influence on other schools. My belief is that unless and until this barbarism is fully acknowledged and expunged in all its forms - both overt and subtle - the triviality and vulgarity of what is left over and is *labeled* education will never be correctly diagnosed and set straight. The onus of sexism has been dramatically laid on schools, and all sorts of programs intended to teach corrective content have been adopted by school systems, just as similar programs in "black history" were adopted after the period of black violence and militancy - and I am not opposed to any of these programs *per se* - but the teaching of social justice and a passion for a good society come from the quality of *personal beliefs*, not from programs. We must look at the quality of the teacher, and of the principal for whom s/he works, and of the superintendent who is responsible for hiring these two, and of the members of the

school board who are responsible for hiring *him*, and of the electorate who vote into office the members of the school board - and that means having an awareness of what is *possible*. And so, in the interests of the survival of the possible, we carry on here year after year, waiting and hoping that the rest of the country will catch up with us, delighted when some individual teacher or instructor in a local school of education - or a person from another country! - notices us and wonders if we have anything to contribute to their understanding. We have been visited by educationists from Canada, France, England, Japan and Germany, but have only recently begun to hear the extent to which we were able to give some individuals something of value after they went back home.

Back to the narrative. Having been refused by our three self-made millionaires, we had to look elsewhere for the money we needed. Actually, the neighborhood itself into which we wished to move provided us the solution to our financial problem. What was going on was a violent and destructive process among two groups, one a long-term, stable, and largely elderly Italian population, some first generation, most second generation, who had lived and raised their families in row houses they owned and kept up - and the other, an ever-increasing number of black welfare recipient tenants living in the row house apartments which had been sold to absentee landlords when their Italian owners grew prosperous and moved to the suburbs, leaving behind only the poor and the elderly. These black families, mostly single parent, had many children who were growing up largely unsocialized and

unsupervised amid squalid neglect and despair as their mothers struggled to survive, moving from decaying building to decaying building, struggling to raise children with no parent support whatsoever, struggling with hostile and contemptuous welfare and clinic personnel, struggling to find momentary pleasures with black men who were themselves filled with despair and rage, struggling to defend the existence of their children by defending their behavior against all comers, no matter how delinquent or how inhuman that behavior might be. In other words, this was an armed camp, and battle lines were clearly drawn.

The advantage to us in this unfortunate, even tragic, situation was that the Catholic War Veterans as a group turned out to be such dedicated racists that they were determined to sell their building, even at considerable sacrifice, just so long as they could turn their backs on this neighborhood. We got a very good bargain. Additionally, in spite of the general policy being universally practiced by banks at that time of "red-lining" areas of the inner city they considered bad financial risks for mortgage investment, I did manage to find one sympathetic mortgage officer willing to take a risk with us. We had to do a lot of hurdle-jumping too complicated to go into, but the upshot of it was that the school was able to move out of the storefront we had been using for three months into our new building before the end of November.

Moving into this wonderful building gave us all a marvelous boost in morale. Almost immediately, we began attracting new families, a process which was enhanced by the

fact that we asked the newspapers to run a feature on us. Life in our new neighborhood proved to be at least as exciting as it had been in the old one. The black children living within a block of us began begging to come inside, even beating on the door to be let in. Middle-class white mothers shrank back from their assaults in terror, and a couple even took their darling little blonde girls out of the school, claiming that it was too chaotic for them, that their children needed more "structure," (nothing to do with race or class, of course). When we sent the neighborhood children home for permission to attend our school, most were refused. The word seemed to have gotten around very quickly that we were "not a real school." So we decided to start a pre-school which they *would* recognize as "real," because it would be relevant to their need to find a cheap, reliable, and friendly place to leave their small children while they went to work. This we could do. Soon, we had a group of around eight three- and four-year-olds, mostly black neighborhood, with two mothers in charge. This took place on the second floor of our building, which really was ideally suited for the purpose.

But we still had our financial problem. It was quite clear that we could not expect to survive indefinitely paying teachers nothing, yet we were equally determined not to become a high tuition school. I didn't need salary, since my husband was a college teacher, but George was cleaning offices after hours and on weekends in order to stay afloat, and his wife wanted to quit her job and have a baby, but felt she could not do so unless he could bring in a more reliable income. At this point, I

bethought me of Jonathan Kozol's suggestion for solving this problem which he proposes in his book *Free Schools* (now reissued as *Alternative Schools*): run a business! I began discussing the possibility of setting up a textbook sale company. Nobody wanted to do this, and I realized I didn't, either. But the idea of a business stuck with me.

I have always been attracted to houses, have always wanted to own several. Well, I found a wonderful three-story house for sale on the next street over from ours, owned by an Italian family disgusted with the deterioration of the neighborhood and well enough off to buy elsewhere. I bargained, and we got it. Now I had to get tax exemption from the city for this building. I went about gathering information on the hows and whos of setting up a non-profit corporation, and finally managed to get it accepted by the state. Non-profit status by the city was more difficult, but we finally managed that, too. Within the space of about two years, we acquired four more buildings, one of them a garage next door to the school, one of them an abandoned building being auctioned by the county. All told, our six buildings cost approximately $40,000, most of which I fronted for the corporation, since we had been unable to find any other donors. This money I had inherited from my mother and my aunt, neither of whom had earned it, so I felt it only proper that this unearned money go into our project. I have never regretted this decision for one moment. That $40,000 is now worth at least $500,000 in the money of today and at today's real estate values for this area. I feel amply repaid by this knowledge! At the present writing, they

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bring in $3,000 a month in income, from the renting out of apartments.

But having the buildings did more than provide us with a business. It gave us space to offer people who wanted to teach with us in lieu of salary. That and one hearty meal at noon, courtesy of the government's free and reduced price lunch, went a long way toward supporting them, and we were able to offer a small weekly supplement to eke out a fairly decent rate. We soon had three new teachers, all of whom had sought us out, agreed to our terms, and started right in. Additionally, we made a connection with Antioch College's work-study program, and began taking on a student teacher per quarter, and then two at a time. This was the height of the national preoccupation with "free schools," and what we lacked in expertise and experience, we made up for in excitement. By 1974, we had became a community of some thirty children and seven full-time teachers plus two or sometimes three part-time or student assistants.

Our challenge now became, and has continued to be, to become fully relevant to the families of the neighborhood who had only the public schools of the ghetto as an alternative to us, not just or primarily to the families of the children we had begun busing in from other parts of the city. The popular preoccupation with the idea that school can be a place children love for its own sake was secondary in the minds of these folks to a clear insistence that their children learn to read, write, and cipher. One thing we discovered early on was that it is a lot easier to recognize what is wrong with schools and even what

Hosea, Adam, Star, Larry and Chris

Robin and Chris
Two Faces of Math Class

Debby, Libby and Kaylana

Social Studies Class

changes need to be made than it actually is to do it successfully yourself with all comers - and since we now had a lot of pre-schoolers and elementary school children whose parents would be judging us solely by our educational success, we knew we had to do a far better job than the public schools - and our group was certainly as diverse and multi-problematic as theirs.

The goals of such parents all too often clashed head-on with those of their children! We found ourselves spending far more time teaching kids to deal justly with personal conflicts of all sorts than with the three R's, although our arts and crafts program was always excellent. We understood how educationally relevant this effort at the learning of self-government was, but on the other hand, we did not want to lose kids, and parents had begun letting us know how dissatisfied they were with this emphasis. Since we actually agreed, it was a struggle, because the kids themselves had natural priorities which were perfectly valid in their *own* terms, and had to be respected - and yet, we needed to teach skills as well as work straightening out tangled feelings and beliefs! Our council meetings at this time sometimes took several hours out of the day. Trying to mix social classes and diverse racial and ethnic groups on a genuinely peer basis is more difficult than it might seem. Or so we discovered.

My approach to this issue included a strong belief that teachers themselves need to be very clear and straight in their thinking and stable in their emotions in order to deal with the demands made upon them by kids with great needs, and yet we could not afford to hire therapeutically trained teachers, nor

did we wish to! Part of my belief was that our school *had* to be open to all comers, and that this *all* needed to include teachers as well as families. This policy had its painful moments, although I believe it has worked very much in our favor over the long run. I remember one teacher we had early on who suddenly "broke" and picked up a black boy of around eight and slammed him onto the floor in great fury! Fortunately, the child was not hurt. Yes, there had been provocation, but such a reaction was intolerable - to him as well as to everyone else. We set up a personal growth group which met every week for three to four hours, at which time teachers and others who wished to join could work through their hangups. This was in 1974. That group is still going strong, with sixteen members at present, five of whom are originals. I believe the continued existence of this group has been the core of the continuing life of the school and of the community itself. We also have teachers' meetings, for attending to the working of the school, but this other group is special. We have learned all sorts of ways of giving people support to make changes over the years, such as transactional analysis, reparenting, Gestalt and Jungian techniques, and rebirthing, among others.

The other benefit of having these buildings was that we began attracting families who wanted an apartment to live in, and who decided to let their children attend our school, usually because they found us friendly people to deal with in a very unfriendly world. In the process of rehabilitating our six buildings for occupancy, we began to acquire a lot of skills -

plumbing, wiring, sheet-rocking, carpentry, glazing, floor sanding, plastering, masonry, roofing, and so on.

Since most of our buildings were located on parallel streets, their back yards touched. When we had acquired them, these yards were filled with rubble, so we began clearing them out, planting gardens, and using them for socializing. Our properties had begun taking on more and more of the characteristics of a village, as we enjoyed our barbecues, birthday and holiday celebrations, and generally spending more time together. Teachers who had come to teach with us as a novelty began seriously settling down and investing themselves in a more permanent and more monogamous pattern of living. The group became a kind of center for this new village which was coming into being, serving both to create a common ground of interest and to offer interpersonal support for dealing with the strains of getting through the hangups which divide people.

School families from farther away became attracted to this village atmosphere and began moving closer, either by finding a nearby rental apartment or by actually buying up an old or abandoned building. We found our rehabilitation skills very popular indeed, and began gathering to help one another in weekend "work parties," at which twenty of us would pool our efforts on one place, accomplishing rapid and low-cost miracles of building rescue and refurbishment. More and more, our streets became after-school and summertime ""play streets," with the old Italian people serving gladly as built-in stoop supervisors of their activities.

By 1978, so many young couples who were connected with us in one way or another were getting pregnant and coming up against the up-tightness and cost of obstetrical care that I decided to organize a pregnancy and childbirth support group which would function both to help them find what they wanted and would also function as an advocacy group for more enlightened and liberal attitudes toward birth. From this beginning, we moved on to the setting up of a center in the basement of one of our buildings which offered medical and legal self-help education at no or very low cost to anyone who wanted to use us. We named it The Family Life Center. One of our reasons for doing this was certainly a need to solve the problem of the high cost of medical insurance for our school people, but the interesting thing was the fact that the more we worked with families to help them get what they wanted, the more we realized how revolutionary our concept was, and how much of a logical extension of the concept of a school which belongs to the families who use it.

It is my belief that the two institutions which create the worst feelings of helplessness on the part of families are the educational and the medical ones. A parent who runs into conflict with either of them can be seriously damaged, even jailed! People who accept the consequences for their children of the model of life on which these social institutions are based have no trouble they cannot handle, but if they cannot accept these beliefs and still have no other options, then they are going to feel bound into the larger society and hence to its rules. To belong to one of the clinics run by medically-insured health

plans or to have group medical insurance necessitates a certain level of income, which insures that poor people have their "own" medical care and effectively shuts out anyone else. A young couple wanting to have a baby is going naturally to assume the necessity of a certain level of income in order to pay for this child's medical care. But even this distinction of class doesn't touch the heart of the problem as I see it. The real problem is the extent to which our society robs parents and children of their autonomy, starting right at birth, and continuing on through childhood. The outcome is, or may be, good for the society (although I actually do not believe that it is), but it creates all sorts of problems for the recipients of the "system," including the phenomena of widespread drug use, passivization in general, a high divorce rate, ignorant parenting, a high delinquency rate among the children, lowered reading and math scores, and an epidemic of emotional disturbance. (And they can't spell, either!) I'm not laying all these problems at the doors of the schools and doctors' offices, but I am saying that by default, they are responsible for the fact that people grow up and have children without either proper personal or social support and information, with which to play the roles, in having taken over the traditional teaching functions which once belonged to parents and neighbors.

We decided not to do it that way! We all teach, take care of each other's kids, doctor them, take responsibility for their behavior, look upon them as in some sense our joint responsibility. We do the same things with each other as

families, and have gradually taught ourselves how to play all the roles more and more effectively.

All of this has meant that our very limited incomes go a lot farther than one would expect - and that we work very hard! But over time we have learned to increase our joint prosperity and pleasure in other ways. We have our own natural foods store at discount prices, a small bookstore of titles we have found particularly helpful, a library which runs now to two rooms-full of books both fiction and non-fiction, a large tape library - both audio and video - and an extensive articles file to which we constantly add up-to-date information on a wide variety of topics. Recently, we started a mail order business for such items plus equipment like the birthing stool we manufacture and sell all over the country. Three years ago we set up a pooled investment group which enables us to get higher interest rates on savings as well as give small loans and now, pay for our own insurance on a limited basis.

The difference when you stop believing in the necessity of paying for specialists to take care of you all the time is striking! Because none of us is tempted to claim exclusive right to be an "expert" for others, we all feel free to ask one another for support and advice in times of need. This is not a mystique, mind you. Nobody has any qualms about taking a kid to a doctor or consulting a lawyer or going to the dentist when what needs fixing is clearly something that person can do better or knows more about than any of us - but what we *have* done is to de-mystify the roles played by these specialists. The reason it works as well as it does is that we have learned through

Chris' Class - Helen, David, Abra, Patty, Sarah

Mask-making - Mary and Michael

Betsy and Kathleen
Various Classes

Graduation
Rosalie and Joannie

experience what to tackle ourselves and what to leave to someone with specialized skills. And we have learned ways that work *better* than the societally-approved ones in the crucial areas of maternity, parenting and education.

This is not as difficult as it might sound. The personal quality most relevant to learning this kind of discrimination is *common sense*, apparently considered to be a rare commodity in our society! Perhaps having had a New England Yankee upbringing gave me, as the most influential community member in our early history, a more highly developed belief in the efficacy of that commodity than other members came with. You might say, the teaching of common sense is our most important product. Noticing how much we all can - and often do - understand better than any outsider could because we know each other in depth gives us all a great sense of strength and self-direction which is difficult if not impossible for most families to develop in such a fragmented society.

So, for example, when a child or an adult gets sick, we don't automatically rush him to a doctor. A number of us have been trained to perform a competent physical examination, and all of us know each other's liability patterns which form the context in which the illness is occurring. We own a community otoscope, blood pressure apparatus, fetascope, vaginal speculum, and have a shelf full of first aid equipment. We have learned the use of echinacea (which we grow in one of our back yards) to help support our immune systems when stress-related illnesses arise, and homeopathics to treat a wide variety of symptoms. Our extensive non-fiction library includes books and articles

on every conceivable subject having to do with understanding modern life, including a number of medical textbooks and other how-to manuals. Most of have done CPR (cardio-pulmonary resuscitation). We have a monthly parenting support group and a cooperative pre-natal support group for pregnant couples. Additionally, two of us who are nurses show films and give talks to other groups on midwifery and natural birth. We two also do labor coaching in the hospital, and home or birthing center birth with couples who are willing to find medical backup.

Well, there are a lot more agencies we have thought up, like the Money Game, a mutual investment group which enables people with low incomes to invest in bank savings plans usually available only to people who put in lots of moola, and Rainbow Camp, a lodge on a small lake in the foothills of the Taconics which we bought for relief from city life. To help pay for this addition, we also set up a weekend workshop program to which we invite leaders from a wide variety of fields come and teach us, the fees for which are paid by the other people who come to learn with us, with some left over for taxes and insurance.

Looking back at how we have developed our ways of governing ourselves, I suppose in the beginning I would have to say I had a lot to do with how decisions came to be made, because of having to get the school going the way I wanted it to go. It may be that this fact has led to our habit of seeking consensus on most decision-making that affects us all. I hate factionalism. Being a pretty decisive person, I guess the

consensus tended to go more in the direction I wanted it to than not at first, but what that did was to discourage people who couldn't cope with my ways, and those who stayed on have been a very compatible and cooperative group of people. The longer we have worked and lived with one another, the more we have come to respect one another and to value the process which leads to that consensus. We thoroughly enjoy one another's company, and spend a lot of time giving and going to one another's parties. We have had six weddings, and eight babies have been born to families in "the village." Because two of us are nurses, one having decided to take nurse's training after teaching in the school for eight years, we have been able to do a lot of labor coaching in the hospital with various school families, and have even done a few home births. The babies in the school who are between the ages of birth and two years seem to me a breed apart, so alert, outgoing, playful, active, and affectionate that it is a joy just to watch them together.

I remember one early fall evening this year when my car was on the fritz, and I walked down to a meeting that was being held at Nora and Steve's house, a house that had originally cost $500 at auction and had been slated for demolition when the young couple took it on. I only wish you could see it now! At any rate, as I turned the corner and started down the narrow, steep street on which eight of "our" houses are located, Emily and Lanny were just walking out of their half-done house holding Janey's hands between them and with young Terry perched on Lanny's shoulders. Ed and Maggie were painting their new front steps and waved as we walked down the hill.

Molly peered out of her front window and gave a cheery hello. Henry, Nanny and Katie were working in their garden. Benny and Barbie were playing hide-and-seek with Kenny from up the hill, and their mother was chatting with Edith on the front steps. Milly and Tracy were just rounding the corner from Elm St., and behind them ran Jesse, scrambling to catch up. Bill's and my house is a couple of blocks away, and I love it too, but to me, the village has a special quality that makes it mine in a way nothing else can equal. It is home. It is life!

June, 1983.

THE FREE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

COMMENT:

This article appeared in Offshoots of Orgonomy *in the spring of 1985. I have included it because of my concern for the model we embody of a school-centered community. The question of whether or not we would call ourselves "Reichian," and our school "Summerhillian" was one of the issues I had in mind in addressing myself to this issue of models. For me., it all boils down to the question of "democracy," as opposed to, I suppose, subtle manipulation of children by adults, and has become a divisive test of orthodoxy among alternative school people, as it was at the time among "Reichians."*

My concern, in contrast, has never been the purity of formulation of our model in either conformity or contrast with anyone else's model, whether that model be Summerhillian, Waldorfian, Froebelian, Montessorian, Progressive, or whatever. Once you establish an orthodoxy, even the orthodoxy of "democracy," you lose authentic immediacy, it seems to me. Carl Rogers, I think (or was it Fritz Perls?), pointed out that you cannot simultaneously view a person as a person and as part of a "system" - any system! Each one of us is unique, and violating that fact creates a degree of what Whitehead would call "misplaced concreteness," or what I would call putting people into slots. The result strikes me as inviting adherents to these formulations to form exclusive societies, as the names given to themselves by many tribal societies often translate into "the people," or "the human beings," as opposed to non-members of the

particular tribe. This article is an attempt to struggle with this sort of question.

An article about The Free School entitled "Shoestring School" appeared in *The Journal of Orgonomy* for May, 1977. Seven years later, the school is still essentially as described in that article, operating on a "shoestring," of approximately the same size - forty kids, ten staff - but now we have become even more of a community than we were then. In addition to the nine buildings clustered in a two-block area of downtown Albany owned by the school (income from which constitutes about two-thirds of our economic base), families associated with the school in some way now own an additional eight buildings in the general area and consider themselves part of The Free School community. It is the community, of which the school is a center, about which I am writing.

The things about us that define us as a community are:

1) work democracy
2) total mutual support for families

1) The term "work democracy," coined by Wilhelm Reich, refers to the sort of criteria for community based on both need and obligation, as I will indicate further below. I view this way of operating as a pragmatic definition of peer level status among adults both in the community and among the adults in the school, as well as that between adults and kids. In the case of the kids, I mean peer level status of the kind Neill practiced - i.e., kids being treated as what you might call "ontological peers" by adults who deal both honestly *and* lovingly with kids

and expect the same from them - which, as Neill made clear, is totally different from permissiveness. This way of being with one another extends to all the families living in the community or attending the school.

2) "Total mutual support" is an involved term for us. What it boils down to is that everyone in the community plays the roles usually assigned to specialists. In modern western industrial society, we take it for granted that parents do the parenting, teachers do the teaching, and we call in other experts when we need them - doctors, lawyers, therapists, plumbers, carpenters, auto mechanics, bankers, insurance agents, and so on, the myriad of outside people who ordinarily play their adjunctive roles in the lives of families.

Well, what's wrong with this plan? Several things, I would say. In the first place, it doesn't always work very well. Assembly-line psychology tends to replace human contact when one does the same job day in, day out. We all know how important it is to find a good babysitter, a good pediatrician, a good auto mechanic, a good insurance man, and more and more frequently, a good marriage counselor when our relationship goes wrong. All too often, we have to put up with the people we can find, and end up struggling against the limitations of the role they are able to play. And when it comes to income tax time, we get to look at how much of our annual income is spent on these outside services, and how much energy we spend accumulating the income to pay for them!

I think the biggest price we pay is the latter. In all too many cases, family life has become an experience confined to

the hours outside of nine-to-five weekdays, plus holiday time! The question is, does this system work better than the old one? The statistics on divorce and child abuse suggest it does not, even though some families seem to cope very well. By and large, however, we seem to have changed problems, not solved them. Yet it looks as though few of us have noticed the trap we have fallen into. Perhaps that is because, as has always been the case, it is the children who are the ones who do recognize it, and they can't do anything about it! As has always happened in the past, it will be up to them to try to develop a new pattern based on their first-hand experience of what is wrong with this one. Unfortunately, knowing what is wrong has never guaranteed that one will come up with something that works! I see no reason why this time should be different. It is as though we are doomed to solve the problems of the last generation instead of those of our own.

We didn't want to wait! We wanted to have the good life everyone is struggling to get *now* - you might say, to have our cake and eat it too! And paradoxically, that has meant taking on a lot more roles than most people think of doing as a way of simplifying our lives as a community! We all teach, take care of each other's kids, doctor them, take responsibility for their behavior, look upon them as in some sense our joint responsibility. We do the same things with each other as families, and have gradually taught ourselves how to play all the roles more and more effectively.

All of this has meant that our very limited incomes go a lot farther than one would expect. But we have begun

increasing our joint prosperity in still more ways. We have our own natural foods store at discount prices, a small bookstore of titles we have found particularly helpful, a library which runs now to two rooms-ful of books both fiction and non-fiction, a large tape library, and an extensive articles file to which we constantly add up-to-date information on a wide variety of topics. Recently, we started a mail order business for such items plus equipment like the birthing stool we manufacture and sell all over the country. Three years ago we set up a pooled investment group which enables us to get higher interest rates on savings as well as give small loans and now, pay for our own insurance on a limited basis.

The difference when you stop believing in the necessity of paying for specialists to take care of you all the time is striking! Because none of us is tempted to claim exclusive right to be an "expert" for others, we all feel free to ask one another for support and advice in times of need. This is not a mystique, mind you. Nobody has any qualms about taking a kid to a doctor or consulting a lawyer or going to the dentist when what needs fixing is clearly something that person can do better or knows more about than any of us - but what we *have* done is to de-mystify the roles played by these specialists. The reason it works as well as it does is that we have learned through experience what to tackle ourselves and what to leave to someone with specialized skills.

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So, for example, when a child or an adult gets sick, we don't automatically rush him to a doctor. A number of us have been trained to perform a competent physical examination, and all of us know each other's liability patterns which form the context in which the illness is occurring. We own a community otoscope, blood pressure apparatus, fetascope, vaginal speculum, and have a shelf full of first aid equipment including a stock bottle of ampicillin and one of gantrisin supplied to us by a sympathetic doctor, which we use so infrequently, they have lasted for several years! Our extensive non-fiction library includes books and articles on every conceivable subject having to do with understanding modern life, including a number of medical textbooks and other how-to manuals. Most of have done CPR (cardio-pulmonary resuscitation). We have a monthly parenting support group and a cooperative pre-natal support group for pregnant couples. Additionally, two of us who are nurses show films and give talks to other groups on midwifery and natural birth. Three of us do labor coaching in the

hospital. Two of us have done home birth, although we do not *advocate* it.

We have gradually developed a number of group resources which allow people to spend time focusing on living patterns including their own personal growth as well as their growth as a couple and as parents. We have, for example, a weekly therapeutic group which serves many community functions including couples support, and most crucially, gives us a way of steadily deepening our contact with one another, of sharing our inner lives in enough depth so that a wide variety of viewpoints can always be brought to bear on any individual problem. When a couple or a member of the community feels the need for some form of therapeutic or healing support, no money exchanges hands for our playing of that role, because the roles are frequently reversed. This group, currently with seventeen members, has been in existence since 1974, and seven of us who were in on the beginning are still there!

We also have a weekly "movement" class after school which allows people - parents, teachers, whoever - to make better and better contact with the life of the body, the physical aspect of being open to their inner life. Sometimes we dance or do our own free version of Tai Ch'i. In this group we all learn together how to relax physically, to breathe fully, to trust one another with deep feelings, to let down the tensions which ordinarily shut us off from full inner contact with our sense of well-being including the capacity for full sexual expression. Interestingly, over the twelve years of our existence as a community, the people who came to be with us, initially mostly

unmarried and with either one (uncommitted) sexual partner or with one of a series of different ones, have made a commitment to one relationship, gotten married (we have had *six* weddings in the community in those twelve years!), and have remained faithful to that primary relationship. The few who came as married couples have gradually learned how to enjoy increasing marital satisfaction. The kind of sexual poaching or partner swapping that has eroded group trust and caused suffering among both adults and children in some intentional communities which do not advocate "compulsory monogamy" is not a problem in ours. This has not come about as a result of a formally adopted rule or policy, but out of the consensus we have developed together about what works and what creates problems.

It was a bit scary in the beginning, taking the chance that we really could use enough common sense and had enough skill to know the difference between what we could properly handle and what not to attempt in the way of "self-regulation," in the face of what society labels as pathology. We all know so much about what can go wrong when people try to take control of their lives in the fields of education, medicine, and the law, particularly the horrors of what groups do who take therapy into their own hands - all of which fears are valid in reality terms in the society at large! - that most of us truly believe we have no alternative but to leave all these important things to "experts." I would say that it has taken us as a group all of these twelve years to discover how much we could learn to do, and to do safely and well. During the early years we lost a few

members who did not believe they could get what they wanted from us, but we have learned as much from these "failures" as from anything else. The gradualness of this learning process has been an important ingredient in our success, perhaps the crucial ingredient. The focus of that process has been maturation in the broadest sense of the term. This is not something one can acquire in a hurry! The health, or optimal functioning, of the community is a measure of the relative maturity of the entire group of its members.

When one views "health" or "optimal functioning" as a model in isolation from the issue of responsibility and autonomy, you may be actually basing your observations of the way people act in terms of a norm or goal in contrast with which they are exhibiting some degree of undesirable deviation - in other words, in terms of pathology versus health instead of autonomy and responsibility versus dependency and infantilism. That isn't how one grows. You can scold people for acting childish until you become hoarse, and they won't change. People who make changes in their life patterns do so because it makes sense to them! The concept of self-regulation is as essential among adults as it is with kids, and they require as much loving support and feedback on their impact on others as kids do. We have come naturally to realize how much health and happiness depend on one's capacity for mature self-regulation. People who get sick a lot or otherwise have serious problems in our community are often expressing dependency needs indirectly instead of learning how to deal with them openly. Denial of need is a very common characteristic of the

members of our "modern" alienated society. Chronic illness and other maladaptive behaviors like alcoholism and drug addiction are all results of this alienation. Emphasizing health or prevention of disease alone would not address this aspect of the issue of wellness. Defining happiness or wellness as a function of maturity works better in allowing people to *learn* how to take care of themselves.

The other aspect of our community which creates our success in both attracting and keeping families as members is, I believe, the richness and variety of resources we offer each other which are not available in the society at large. Aside from the school, which gives people a skill, a living which, though not prosperous is reliable and sufficient, and a place for their children to grow up in a loving group of friends and teachers, we have also developed a number of other resources which have enriched our lives as a community.

In addition to the group enterprises and activities mentioned above, individual members of the community have offerings of their own. Three families share the care of a couple of goats. (Yup, right in down-town Albany. We had a real barn-raising last spring!) Many of us have backyard gardens! Two families raise bees. One is a skilled barber who gives us all haircuts, both men and women - one a magnificent masseuse (I get a massage every week!). A number of families have developed their own enterprises to supplement the very modest income we are able to pay each other as teachers. One family has developed a business selling French water heaters which heat a copper coil when and only when the faucet is turned on -

which saves a tremendous amount of fuel. Two husbands are partners in a wooden boat-building and repair business which is beginning to "take off" in reputation and customers after four years of barely making it! They are both superb craftsmen!

We also seem to foster individual enterprise in verbal creativity. Two (both ex-school kids from the school) are writers, have one book out which is already in its second printing, are working on their second. I started my own tiny publishing company and press, have so far published four books of my own and two of other people's I thought deserved to be read. One of these was an M.A. thesis written by a member of the community who received her degree last winter. Her thesis, which she allowed me to publish, focused on the theories of Piaget, Skinner and Dewey in relation to her ten years' experience as a teacher at our school. She is going on to get her Ph.D next year. Her aim is to give people in education departments a better understanding of what we have learned and done with kids, written in terms they can relate to. The community as such takes no credit for this talent and energy, but it is clear to me that being members of the community who support one another for accepting our own uniqueness naturally fosters such enterprise.

In the setting of this all-embracing community, the school as such becomes far more of a community center and less a school in the sense of the traditional institution. Learning flows naturally out of the total atmosphere set up in the community and is much less a goal in itself. Skills learning - which the kids love, by the way - takes very little

time in the total scheme, and things like putting on plays, making puppets, singing, sports, movies, reading out loud, playing games, doing crafts, and just messing around, take up most of it. One of the nicest aspects of this way of "doing school" is that the adults have as much fun as the kids! Staff burnout is unknown among us.

Most non-public schools have to worry about where their support comes from. We don't, because we have figured out an internal source of basic support, as I mentioned briefly above - from the nine buildings we now own and from which we derive rent income. Tuition is on top of that base, so we can afford to charge people a very low level of tuition which even people on welfare or people whose support comes from $5.00-an-hour jobs can afford. We figure that having solved the economic issue as we have has given us a tremendous amount of freedom!

Since the school has now been in existence for fifteen years, we have begun to have a pretty good idea of our ultimate impact on the lives of children. Because we have always accepted kids with whatever presenting problems or circumstances they may have, just as the public schools do, we have had among our alumni a fair number who could easily have been labeled as having problems. We have never sought out "problem" kids, but we have never turned them down, either. It is of particular interest to me to look at how these so-called problem kids have turned out. Of course it is easier to remember the successes than the "failures," but actually, we continue to be amazed at how many of those we considered failures have come back dazzlingly "together."

One rather extreme example will suffice. Albert arrived on our doorstep as a truant from public school whose physical size made him look about six at the age of eleven, squint-eyed and "hyper," having been labeled by the school psychologist as retarded, with an IQ of 60-some and in a "special education" course, a total non-reader. He was with us for three exciting years, during which time he managed to create lots of drama around himself. Once he nearly electrocuted himself fiddling with the guts of an old TV set. Once I had to bail him out of the local police station for robbing somebody's mailbox of their welfare check! When he left, at the age of fourteen, he still couldn't read, although his math was pretty good. Mainly, however, he couldn't sit still in one place for more than a few minutes! It was as though his energy system simply worked too fast for him to be able to slow down long enough to learn how to decode the verbal symbols, which to me was an odd definition of retardation! Is it "retarded" to live too rapidly?

After struggling with junior high school for a year, Albert quit school. He worked in a garage for a while until they fired him for not being able - or willing - to complete jobs. The next thing we heard, he was married, at about sixteen, and had a child. He would come back from time to time. It was a proud day for him when he enrolled in an adult education course, but he couldn't stick at it for long. For a while he lived in Florida on welfare with his wife and child. Then we heard he had enrolled in another reading course, still unable to read, and had been drifting from one job to another and from one part of the country to another. Somehow he seems to have kept the dream

in his mind of learning to read. I saw him on the street during one of his periodic trips home, and he told me proudly, "Mary, you should see my room! I got bookshelves all around it. I *love books*!" I nearly wept.

One day I got a call from a Catholic priest in a nearby city who wanted to know if Albert was for real, did he *really* want to learn how to read, was what he was telling him actually true? In ordinary terms, his story was pretty unbelievable, I guess. I said it was all true,. that Albert was somebody special, and urged him to do the best he could for our Albert. I don't know if it was this time he made it or the next time, but somehow, some way, he got through that narrow door! One of our teachers saw him at the supermarket just before Christmas. Chris was blown away. He said Albert had grown almost a foot, that his crooked eyes were now straight, and that he looked *manly*! Albert told Chris that he could now read, and loved it, and had a good job and a good marriage with four kids - that his life was great!

We don't take credit for that. It is *Albert's* triumph! But he learned that ability to believe in himself with us! That's what we do, in a nutshell. Not all our kids have such severe problems, by any means, but some do. Whatever their original status might have been, one by one, they all seem to want to come back to visit, to get a look at the place where they were so happy or where they turned their lives around, eager to tell us how they are now.

Our aim is to take understanding of the small community with a school at its center out of theory and offer

people a model of how it can work superbly well. In our case, that way of working includes not isolating ourselves, either from parents or from people in general. We don't select kids, but accept whoever comes. We warn their parents in advance what they may find if they stay - and some of them don't return, which is fine with us! Those who do are usually ours for life! Some stay for only one or two years and then go on, mind you, but they come back, and evidently still consider themselves "members of the family."

Similarly, we don't hire teachers, but accept whoever comes, then teach them how to be with us. The ones who leave do so because they can't cope with the changes we insist they make. Most of our teachers have lived in the community for ten years or more. Finding money to live on has always been a joint responsibility, since the school belongs to us all! So we don't really pay salaries - it's more dividing up the income we get among everybody, with adequate allocations for the needs of the property itself. So far, no one school member has received more than $100 a week take-home, and a few, who live in school-owned apartments, receive half that amount. Here is one place the concept of work-democracy comes in. Since the entire school operation (as well as all our community functions) is managed by members of the community, all funds are shared out among ourselves according to a system based on ability and need. During the summer, we pay two or three people to do rehab work on our buildings, so for some of us, at least, income is all year long. For those who either elect to do

other things or for whom there is not enough money, they may be expected to find their own support during the summer.

It is my belief that people - any people, no matter how "pathological" their behavior patterns might be - are innately superb. It isn't necessary to search for "super teachers" for our school kids, nor do we need to find "super-parents" like Neill and Reich or people who have been through orgonomic therapy in order to study "healthy" child-rearing. Our community has a simple criterion for evaluating the ones who can do it: namely, that they take "us" seriously enough to come, stay, and learn. If they are parents or teachers, that initially they take responsibility for following up on whatever recommendations we may make for opening up to the possibility of making changes in their ways of looking at themselves, because kids can't wait! And, generally, that they understand what we have for them sufficiently well to invest themselves. Nothing follows from their refusal to do so, because that would constitute an invasion of their autonomy, but it remains there for them to look at. And they do! Currently the parents of two kids who have been with us for over a year are moving closer and closer to "us" because they can now see what we may have for *them* if they choose to accept it. We have a women's gathering on the summer solstice which is about sharing on a very deep level, giving and receiving support. The men have one in the fall which is equally magnificent! But the heart and soul of the community is our weekly growth group. This, like the "council meeting" system at school, is the chief forum we have for learning to live with, work with, and understand each other.

Wilhelm Reich said, "Love, work and knowledge are the wellsprings of life. They should also govern it." The principles by which our community lives and by which it is governed are indeed love, work and knowledge. It is in this sense - of dedication to the wellsprings of life - that our community could be said to be "orgonomic," even if we refuse to attach any label, Reichian or any other, to who we are and what we do.

THE PURSUIT OF LITERACY

COMMENT:

This article was written in 1977 for Jonathan Kozol's short-lived and potentially very valuable journal on literacy, unpublished as a result of the premature death of the new journal. I decided it is worth including because of the acute necessity, it seems to me, of demystifying this issue of illiteracy, which, as Jonathan is saying, is one of the most crucial ones for a democracy; at least as crucial as the related and equally unresolved one concerning the status of women. No society, it seems to me, which allows these two related issues to go unresolved generation after generation can hope to survive indefinitely. The consequences of our continuing to ignore them, thereby letting in the four Apocalyptic Horsemen (conquest, slaughter, famine and death; I would add a fifth - pestilence) - is, I believe, directly related to the ultimate issue of nuclear holocaust, as pediatrician and mother Helen Caldicott has pointed out so clearly.

I live and work in the south end of Albany, New York, one of two inner city enclaves in Albany, and, until recent gentrification set in, the more neglected and derelict of the two. "Successful," (for which, read "upward mobile") black and poor families tend to move to the other neighborhood known as Arbor Hill, which has an extensive and quite attractive federally-financed low-rise housing project for the poor as well as an imaginatively designed and (at least, initially) innovative

public school built some ten years ago. There is some overlap, to be sure, of bombed-out houses and other signs of terminal community deterioration, but less of it than in the South End, which seems to me to retain more of the helpless, hopeless poor who "ain't goin' nowhere." If anything, the gentrification process has merely enhanced this despair.

The Free School - ours - serves a very small portion of those poor families, most of whom send their children to one of the three public schools or two parochial schools which serve the area. We have only twenty to thirty of the children of the South End families (the rest of our children coming from other parts of the city or from nearby cities and towns) - most of them welfare or working class poor: black, hispanic and white. But since many of these local children come to us because the other schools have failed them in some signal ways, we have developed a pretty strong sense of what goes wrong for them. And our conclusion is that for a large and increasing number, these schools are failing in their job of turning out literate candidates for full participation in a democratic society, such as ours is alleged to be!

Parents, of course, blame the schools for this failure (although a few upwardly mobile ones take the more "respectable" position of blaming the children), and inevitably, teachers and administrators blame the families. The result of this kind of circularity is that everyone in the literacy game loses! It is too easy for parents to believe that this result is the end product of some vast conspiracy and for school personnel to believe that the children of the poor are ineducable.

Actually, most teachers and principals are truly dedicated people who work very hard at their jobs, a task which they experience as being as nearly impossible as swimming upstream against a strong current. "Staff burnout" is commoner than the common cold in ghetto schools. So what is it that goes wrong? Are the poor ineducable?

To understand this phenomenon, as I see it, you must first go back to its inception, to the moment when the boundaries of two worlds meet: when a mother walks into a school with her first child to enroll him in kindergarten. To her it must feel like suddenly entering a combat zone, considering the general tension level of the corridors and the clerks' office, the eyes carefully blank and evaluating, or exchanging sideways glances, the held-in breath, the feeling of energy dammed-up and held back, perhaps even the sudden darting of a child escapee from around a corner, the hot physical or vocal pursuit by a teacher-guard (a man), ending in physical restraint of some sort, a shaking, or, at the least, a scolding and a threat. The girls this mother sees all seem prim and conspiratorial, the boys hostile and turned-off, the adults grim and exasperated.

To the clerks behind the high counter, of course, this new pair looks just like every other unit in an endless assembly line of people, practically all of them recalcitrant to being assembled or processed. Yet, the demand of the job is for this child to be fitted in - "handled," (stapled, folded, punched, sometimes mutilated) - filed. Perhaps the clerk is wondering what savagery or delinquency is going to come roaring out of

this kid when this mother leaves, or will he just be one of the dead-heads? Perhaps she thinks, "This job doesn't pay me enough to deal with this human scum!" The expression on her face suggests that she does, thinks the mother.

To the child, the tall counter looks like an insurmountable wall, miles higher than his scale of reference. Actually, it is a perfect symbol of the school as it appears to him in more ways than one. The other children, no matter how else they may be, are at least alive! The adults are totally impenetrable, unreachable, a complete mystery to be fathomed and coped with.

I have been inside all these schools in our area, both public and parochial, including the "innovative" one across town, and although the administrative people inside them are by no means unfriendly people, they are universally shell-shocked and war-weary. I am always glad to be outside again! It is that atmosphere of combat, I believe, which sets the tone, for this mother, of the entire enterprise of "school." I cannot blame her for wanting to repeat this experience as seldom as possible. The pity is that no one seems to understand what creates the problem.

There is nothing "wrong" with the culture of poverty except for the fact that it doesn't "work" in the majority culture, mainly because it doesn't include literacy, except as an abstract concept. The culture of despair, which is the end result when that poverty culture is destroyed by the various institutions of our society, leading to the breakdown of the family support network which has traditionally been the mainstay of the poor,

has the result of "freeing" the children from restraints that work. These children become ill or truant (either literally or figuratively) so frequently that the continuity of learning becomes impossible. Even when they are present, their preoccupation with excitement, principally the excitement of sex and other extreme affective stimuli such as various forms of crime, violence and mood alteration by various means, makes school unbearably tedious by contrast. And when the school attempts to intervene in this alienation, all too often the intervention is punitive and elicits the support of the parents for the child against the school, or creates only a response from them of indifferent cynicism. The result is a growing habit of alienation which becomes a way of life when reinforced by peer opinion. Schools simply cannot compete with the thrill of life on the streets, and children who cannot read, write, or cipher become precociously street-wise in ways which increase their reluctance to submit to the enforced passivization and regimentation, let alone the infantilization (in their terms) of such school activities as go on in the classroom.

When we in our school get a kid like this, or his little brothers and sisters who look up to him as a model, we have learned to look at both the aims of the parents as well as those of the kid. We take it for granted that the parents will become easily threatened if we accuse the child of wrong-doing, or even of truancy, and so we usually work primarily with the child himself in such a way that he cannot plug in his "game" in a way that will split him off from the school community, as he did in his other school/s. Sometimes it doesn't work - the kid

is too angry or too enamored of the life of the streets. We always warn a parent that this may happen, and that what will make a difference in the long run is the amount of faith the parent can put in our sincerity and genuine concern about the life and future of that family and that kid. Quite often, especially if the child is still pretty young and open to being influenced, willing to learn to find pleasure within the school setting and even in his school work, it works! And we find that the less "successful" - e.g., upward mobile - the parents are, the better it works. People whose aim is to join the majority culture in terms of standards recognized as symbols of success - material goods as criteria of excellence - for the most part leave us alone. We are too funky for them! And that's good, because their kids would not do well with us. The draw in two conflicting directions - that of the parents and of the school - would be too painful for them. The pleasure would totally die! So that's OK with us, because they can make it elsewhere anyhow. Paradoxically, we get the children of families who lack "aspirations" in general, being more interested in the immediate quality of life - whether at the "bottom" or the "top" of the class system, or in between.

In sum, then, we take on the responsibility for creating a space in which all the factors which actually inhere in the failure of the educational system can interact in new ways. As teachers, we refuse to function as helpless captives of that system, and we allow parents the power they require in order to experience themselves as members of the educational enterprise. We do not *require* of them that they work with or

for us, but we ask them to if they are able to do so, and very many of them do. We make clear to parents and kids alike that the kids are primarily responsible for their own choices and behavior. We expect children as young, say, as five years of age to take on the task of getting up in the morning, dressing, and getting to school on time for breakfast. And because the kids want to be in the school, it works. In school, kids are also responsible for their choices, and are then held to their commitments. Grievances are very seriously listened to by the entire school (on the grade school level - we also have a pre-school department which starts anywhere after birth). Any child can call a council meeting which every person, child or adult, is bound to attend, at which the problem or grievance is gone over very carefully and in great detail until every person involved is totally satisfied that the issue has been resolved. This meeting is conducted according to strict Roberts' Rules of Order, and children begin serving as elected chair of those meetings from the age of five onward, a task for which they develop remarkable expertise surprisingly quickly. The children also learn very rapidly and well to play the role of "fair witness" to each other in the process of solving the presented problem.

What I am saying, really, is that it's not at all difficult to turn the entire picture of functional illiteracy around in such a way that the result is virtually universal success instead of failure. Our national preoccupation with "learning disability" as an explanation for that massive failure of the educational system is merely a "buzz word" which conceals the reality of racial and class prejudice against the members of a minority

culture, and is in truth merely the end result of the multiple assaults upon functional stability created by the universally destructive effect of our poverty institutions upon children. Poor or non-existent maternity care, lack of education and support for childbirth and neo-natal care, the resort to pacification of children through gratification by sweets, toys, or unlimited and uncensored TV watching as an alternative to violence or neglect, dependence on welfare payments with the constant harassment, intimidation, suspicion, and humiliation involved, plus the stress of ill health brought on by existential despair, insecurity in primary love relationships, and a lack of personal survival skills themselves, all combine to keep families in a chronic state of unfulfilled need, and render the children incapable of focusing on the intricacies of the task to be accomplished. Reestablish support systems for families and the children will miraculously begin to love school again! Ours do.

The pity of this plight of the poor, and of the schools as well, is to me the fact that the system does not fail because of the people involved in it. The temptation is always to believe that it does, because of the dehumanization it creates in its representatives as well as of the poor who are its victims. What can be said of schools could also be said of any institution which deals with the poor, evidencing as it does such a marked degree of dehumanization both of the poor and of the people who administer the institution. This problem lies, as I have said, not in the people but in the "spaces" around them, the

"worlds" which they inhabit and which touch in such mutually destructive ways when they interact.

We Americans take this destructiveness so for granted, it may not have occurred to us to look at the possibility that there are alternative ways of interacting. What comes to my mind is a description by Felix Greene, who spent a lot of time in the early Maoist China. He describes the campaign by which the centuries-long habit of Chinese of spitting in public was overcome peaceably in a few short months. Schoolchildren carried little flags inscribed with the legend, "There is no spitting in the new China" - which these tots would solemnly hold up before any adult who spat in public!

We could change the rules by which public schools operate if we had the will to do so, and all that works, and works very well, in our educational system would still be there, salvageable because the problem concerning illiteracy rests on these other grounds, not the fundamental one of education itself. Elliott Shapiro, the Gestalt-oriented principal of P.S. 119 in Harlem, demonstrated that fact very vividly! The trouble we have in creating universal literacy lies, as John Dewey said a long time ago, and as so many others before him have said of life itself, in our habit of reversing means and ends, of instrumentalizing life as a means to some future end, instead of paying attention to the immediate quality of the life itself!

Teachers who hate their jobs, kids who hate school, parents who hate the way they are forced to live, all see the answer to their problems as plugging themselves into some sort of goal-seeking activity which then becomes a means to that

end, instead of paying attention to the immediate quality of the experience itself. And the society not only encourages that sort of thinking, it mandates it, evidently believing that poor people who wish to "better themselves" should be especially badly treated, perhaps for violating the rules of poverty! Society deals equally unfeelingly with those who serve institutions oriented toward the poor, paying them badly and discouraging "emotional involvement" with their clients! Well, it isn't either sensible or necessary, and in fact, is itself the main problem poor people face!

John Holt, Herb Kohl, and a lot of other people have spoken very eloquently about how the quality of experience I am advocating can be brought into the classroom, as into life itself. When teachers are faced with whole roomfuls of little kids every September, they need to spend time looking and listening, getting in touch with the worlds these kids bring into the room with them. Are they filled with magical notions about Spiderman or Luke Skywalker? Neither of *them* ever has to sit at little tables for hours making black squiggles on pieces of paper every day! They get to do heroic deeds all day long. Does that little skinny girl's arms yearn for the heaviness of her baby brother's little, warm body? Is she sick with fear about what her mother's boy friend may be doing to her mother while she has to sit listening to you talk about words? How can you compete with worlds like these? What do the kids dream about at night? How do they see you? Can they weave you into their world? What do they want, how do they propose to get it? We need to build bridges between their worlds and ours, the

world of literate adults, and to do it very gently so as not to destroy theirs! TV has made that task both easier and harder. Easier because childrens' minds are more open to the magic of new experience, and hence of learning, from the kaleidoscope of TV images to which they are exposed every day, harder because there is so much magic, so much tantalizing of the senses that passivization, quick frustration and boredom are more common than they were in a simpler world.

At The Free School we have found that, for all but a very few seriously damaged children whose capacity for receiving new information is almost nil because of either home or school experiences of the past (usually both), the skills learning part of our school week can be accomplished either in intensive two-hour daily sessions or as part of long-term projects in which the kids are deeply involved such as the school newspaper, building a bookcase, or cooking a meal. And the choice of whether or not to engage in this intensive activity is up to each kid! The rest of the day is open for more spontaneously organized expressive experiences and activities. Kids, particularly city kids, need a lot of time to run, jump, play active games, especially ball games, climb, balance, swim, wrestle, dance, tumble or just "chase," (which I sometimes think ought to be termed "latency foreplay"). We do seem to turn out a lot of accomplished athletes of all kinds! The rest of the time they engage in equally expressive but less strenuous activities such as crafts, nature study, carpentry, putting on plays, making maple syrup, going to museums, taking care of animals, bringing in wood for our wood-burning furnace, taking trips all

over, and so on and on, with no end. They can't help but love school!

John Dewey said it quite a while ago. Perhaps if he had said it more simply, more people might have understood him - but I'll repeat it anyway.

> Education is a constant reorganizing or reconstructing of experience. It has all the time an immediate end, and so far as activity is educative, it reaches that end - the direct transformation of the quality of experience. Infancy, youth, adult life - all stand on the same educative level, in the sense that what is really *learned* at any and every stage of experience constitutes the value of that experience, and in the sense that it is the chief business of life at every point to make living thus contribute to an enrichment of its own perceptible meaning.[1]

1. Dewey, John, *Democracy and Education*, Macmillan & Co., N.Y., p. 89, quoted in *Intelligence in the Modern World, John Dewey's Philosophy*, Joseph Watner, Ed., Modern Library Giant, Random House, Inc., N. Y., p. 627.

In her seventy-three years, Mary M. Leue, mother of five and grandmother of eleven, has been a Maine farmer, registered nurse, teacher, civil rights and anti-war activist, lay midwife, leader in both alternative education and natural childbirth movements, therapist, community organizer, editor, writer, desktop publisher, and bookseller. She has published a number of articles in national and international journals of education and psychotherapy, including the *Journal of Orgonomy*, *Energy and Character*, *Holistic Education Review*, and *EKOAE*, the alternative education journal that she created eight years ago.

Born and raised in New England, Mary graduated with an A.B. in history from Bryn Mawr College in 1940. In 1941, she received her graduate nursing degree from The Children's Medical Center Hospital School of Nursing in Boston, Mass. In the early 1950's, she accompanied her husband, then a young professor of philosophy, to Denton, Texas, where she raised five children, taught school and did graduate work in English literature and education at Texas Woman's University. Mary moved to Albany in the early 1960's and began training with several internationally known therapists, in addition to doing graduate work in psychology at the State University of New York, where she is now a Fellow of the Graduate Program in the Center for Arts and Humanities.

Responding to the distress of her ten-year-old son, who was suffering badly in the Albany public schools, Mary decided to start The Free School, which is now one of the longest running inner city independent alternative schools in the nation. Influenced by the father of anarchism Prince Pyotr Kropotkin, by Mahatma Gandhi, and by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Mary firmly believed that open, democratic education should be available to the children of the poor as well as to those of the middle and upper classes. When she consulted with A.S. Neill, founder of Summerhill, about such a possibility, his response was pure Neill: "I would think myself daft to try."

In 1969, Mary proceeded to gather an entire group of "daft" individuals who are together to this day, having joined her in her vision of living and working in genuine community in a postindustrial world. Guided by Wilhelm Reich's concept of "work democracy," Mary and the others began creating a series of small-scale community institutions to both broaden the school's mission and support the health and growth of community members. She saw clearly from the start that such an experiment would need to have its own internal economy and be based on shared, peer-level leadership, and that it would depend on ongoing, emotional honesty for its long-term survival. Finally, the awareness developed in Mary and in others that a vital community needs a spiritual basis as well, and what has evolved is multifaceted, drawing from many diverse traditions.

This is the second volume in a series of essays written by a woman in her seventies who is struggling to define her selfhood, not simply in terms of her familial, societal heritage as a twentieth century American but in greater depth as a whole being, a significant part of whose identity is by no means simple or easy to delineate. The method she employs is one of weaving between inner and outer process, rather than a more straight-line manner of expression.

The author's belief that one's work in society comes out of that inner wholeness, and not solely out of the aspect of one's being which appears on the surface, readily available to the 'ego,' sets the stage for this second volume which focuses on her formulations for that societal life in manifestation.

The Kabbalah calls this manifest level of existence the 'Malkuth,' or 'The Kingdom.' We may call it the world of matter, or the everyday world; the world in which we ordinarily perceive ourselves as living. Scholars of the Kabbalah direct our attention to all ten of the levels which form the 'tree of life' - of which the Malkuth is the lowest - as essential for understanding the true meaning of one's life and for bringing the sacred nature of one's work to completion within the context of all ten levels.

As in the myth of Theseus, threading the seven-fold pathway of the Cretan labyrinth depicted on the cover, journeying through the labyrinth of life, brings one at times tantalizingly close to the center, only to veer outward toward the periphery once more - in, but in again, until the center is finally reached in a great, almost orgastic blaze of momentary glory - only to turn back upon itself as the journey outward begins.

This volume is an exploratory process of self-understanding through a series of labyrinthine reflections upon the author's journey along that Sacred Way, expressed in terms of her work in school and community. Do not be misled by the everyday language in which this process is expressed. Remember, this is its reflection in the Malkuth! It is the author's hope that in some way the nature of life lived in such a process might be viewed by some readers as a possible model for conscious living within the limits of the exigencies of our planetary home.

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